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Afghanistan

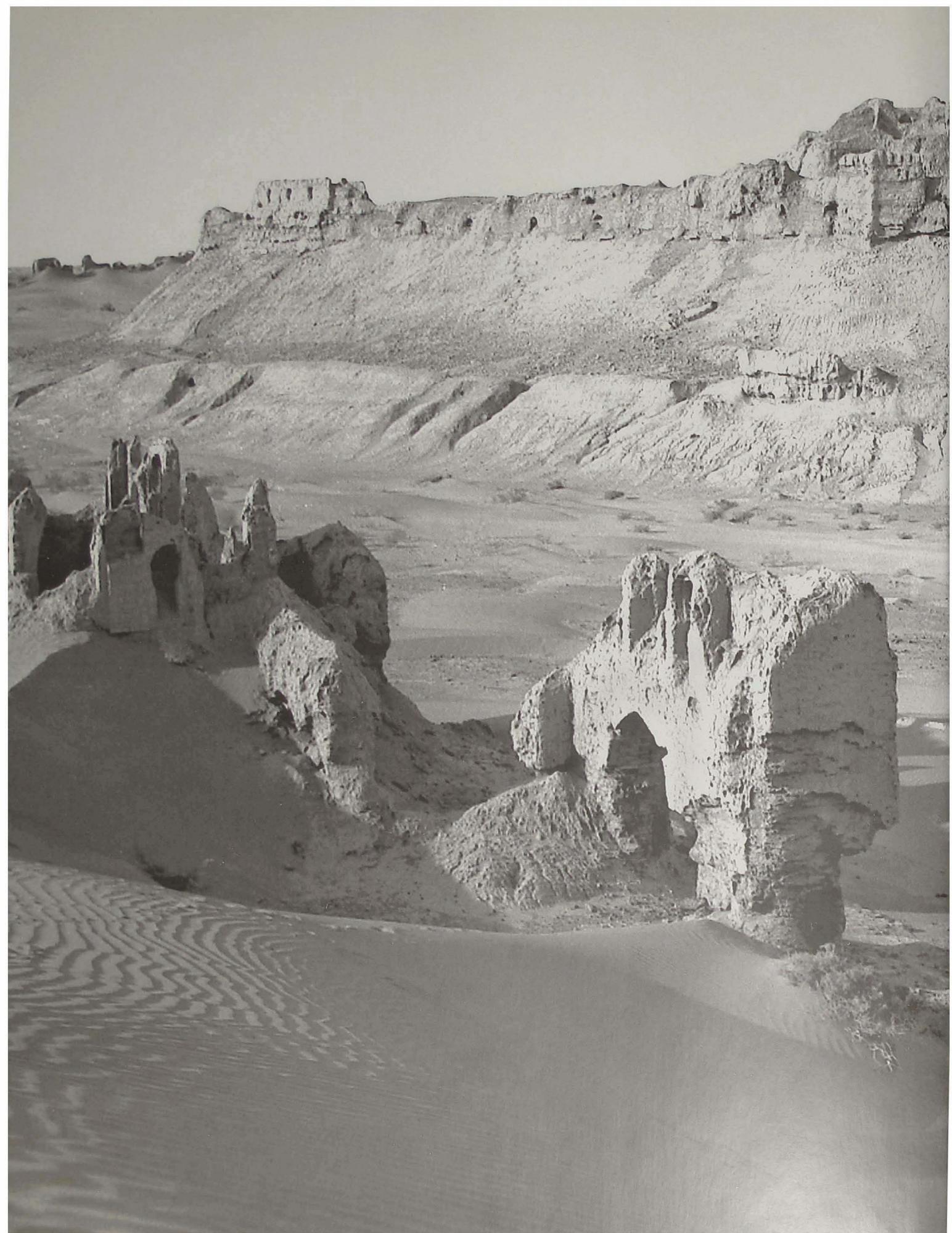
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hidden

Afghanistan

Under the direction of Pierre Cambon
in collaboration with Jean-François Jarrige,
Director of the Musée National des Arts Asiatiques-Guimet

with scientific contributions by
Paul Bernard and Véronique Schilt





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Foreword

Ever since the Bronze Age, Afghanistan has always been a nation with a rich civilisation, throughout the Graeco-Bactrian period, the Kushan Empire, the Hephthalites, and the Islamic era. Situated at a crossroads between East and West, the country has put its stamp on the cultural and artistic heritage of humanity.

It is first and foremost thanks to the French archaeological research team Délégation Archéologique Française en Afghanistan (DAFA), founded at the request of King Amanullah in 1922, that this unparalleled legacy was discovered during the excavations at Bactra, Begram, Lashkari-bazar, Surkh Kotal, Ai Khanum, and at numerous other sites.

The exhibition *Afghanistan, les trésors retrouvés* ('Afghanistan, Rediscovered Treasures' [in Paris]) displays the most important pieces from the collection of the National Museum of Kabul, which were miraculously preserved.

For instance, there are golden cups from the treasure of Tepe Fullol, Graeco-Bactrian objects from Ai Khanum, Roman urns and small Indian plates from Begram, and magnificent jewels from Tillya-tepe. It gives me immense pleasure that, after years of civil war, these masterpieces of the heritage of humanity are displayed at exhibitions in several European cities, including Amsterdam.

This shows that, ultimately, civilisation always gets the better of barbarism, and that light always triumphs over darkness.

His Majesty Mohammad Zahir Shah

Father of the nation

16 October 1914 – 23 July 2007





دین الدین لودیں کا ٹھیکانہ
کتاب پر لپی ضمیرہ

Foreword

At a time when Kabul city was in the flames of war, some political and cultural personalities of the country understood the historical values of the artefacts held in the Kabul National Museum and decided to take them out of the museum showcases and transfer them to safe places, considering these artefacts did not only tell the story of our past but they also belong to the cultural heritage of the world community. More than sixteen years later it became possible to take these artefacts out of the hidden places and expose them to the view of their admirers, not only in Afghanistan but worldwide. Now, after Paris in France and Turin in Italy, Amsterdam can present the preserved artefacts of the Bactrian Treasury to the world community in one of its most beautiful museums. This treasury is a testimony that, despite some bitter accidents of history, our country played a brilliant part in the development and growth of human civilization long ago. We expect that in the future we will keep our place in the caravan of world history.

Today, while Afghanistan is striving to strengthen and develop democracy inside its borders, it faces various problems as the front line in the war the new world has started against backwardness, ignorance, xenophobia

and the negation of human values. The people of Afghanistan rely on the help of their friends and are very pleased to know that the people of the Netherlands are with us in this struggle.

Our Dutch friends do not only accompany us in the war against terrorism, being ready to accept human and material sacrifices; they also do not hold back from us any kind of assistance in the reconstruction of our war torn country.

Choosing Amsterdam for the exhibition of the Bactrian Treasury is not an accident. Organising the exhibition of Afghan archaeological artefacts is a gift from the Afghan people to their Dutch friends and is a new step in strengthening the ties of friendship between Afghanistan and Holland.

I hope this exhibition has deep and lasting effects in bringing the friends in the two countries closer to each other.

H.E. Hamid Karzai

President of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan



The exhibition tour in Europe is organised by Musée Guimet-Paris, Fondazione per l'Arte della Compagnia di San Paolo-Turin and De Nieuwe Kerk-Amsterdam.

The exhibition at De Nieuwe Kerk is initiated in association with the Prince Claus Fund.

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Hidden Afghanistan

Every day we are comprehensively informed by the media about the Afghanistan of today, a land that has been embroiled for decades in an almost hopeless conflict. Through the Dutch involvement there, controversial or not, we are linked to the history of this country. But only many years later will a balanced assessment be possible. Current issues include not just the political discussion about the peace mission, which is taking on more the appearance of waging war than reconstruction. There is also a broader interest, which for example manifests in the great popularity of the recent novels (*The Kite Runner* and *A Thousand Splendid Suns*) by the Afghan writer Khaled Hosseini. These bring current history to our attention and so increase our compassion for this mistreated people that we scarcely know.

The thought that Afghanistan is also a country with a rich and age-old civilisation threatens to be forgotten.

That would be wrong. Afghanistan's geographical location – on the crossroads of the trade routes between East and West – is the link between various cultures, which are further propagated along the Silk Road. So the cultural expressions of the Afghans themselves mingled with the Graeco-Roman, Indian and Chinese civilisations.

The richness of the relics from the past is a bonanza for indigenous and foreign archaeologists, who have inspired many researchers with their excavations; the breathtaking objects thrilled both art lovers and experts. So the damage and destruction of many treasures as a consequence of political upheavals and warfare have shocked the whole world.

Our series of national exhibitions, which through art and culture go deeper into a country's backgrounds and bring it closer, has increasingly drawn the Nationale Stichting De Nieuwe Kerk (The New Church Foundation) to some very current subjects in the last few years. The bridging function between countries that De Nieuwe Kerk intends to fulfil with this series is definitely shown in *Hidden Afghanistan*.

It is very important that the public gets to know the brilliant art treasures from Afghanistan so they realise the high level of civilisation there. The Dutch link with the country is still very removed from art and culture, but the aim is certainly also to make an important contribution to the recovery of this ancient civilisation.

So when we heard about the initiative of the Musée Guimet in Paris to put together an exhibition of recovered masterpieces from the National Museum of Afghanistan in Kabul, we immediately indicated our great interest. Our idea of a European tour was enthusiastically received by the director of the Musée Guimet, Jean-François Jarrige. Together we journeyed to Kabul in June 2006 to ask for support from the Minister of Culture. After another two visits it was settled. The argument that this exhibition would show Afghanistan in another light and add a positive note to the sombre tones of the news reports was ultimately the deciding factor. After Paris, Turin and Amsterdam the exhibition will be shown in Washington, San Francisco, Houston and New York. From the start, all the partners have worked on this project very enthusiastically. We owe a lot of thanks to Jean-François Jarrige, conservator Pierre Cambon and to their colleagues at Guimet, for their inspired, accomplished and expert contributions.

We are grateful to the Minister of Culture and the National Museum in Kabul for the confidence they have placed in us and the cooperation they have provided.

In his foreword, my colleague Mr Jarrige has thanked all the other people involved, and I would like to give my heartfelt agreement. On the Dutch side I would also like to particularly thank the Prince Claus Fund, which made it possible to produce a Dari and a Pashto version of the catalogue, which will be distributed in schools and libraries in Afghanistan. Many thanks too to the Dutch Embassy in Kabul and the Ministries of Foreign Affairs, Defence and Development Cooperation in The Hague for their support.

Also, once again, thank you to our sponsors for the support that we have received for many years: Fortis, Corporate Express and KPMG. And to HGIS Culture Resources, the Mondriaan Foundation and NCDO (the Dutch National Committee for International Cooperation and Sustainable Development).

With this exhibition, we also hope to make some contribution to the rebuilding of the country. Let the strength of its civilisation be the inspiration for recovery and better times in Afghanistan.

Ernst W. Veen

Director, Nationale Stichting De Nieuwe Kerk (New Church Foundation)



Foreword

Jean-François Jarrige

Member of the Académie des Inscriptions et Belles-Lettres

Director of the Musée National des Arts Asiatiques-Guimet, Paris

On 11 March 2001, as the world was learning with sadness and outrage of the destruction of the Buddha statues at Bamiyan, the present author, together with Louis Monreal, then Director of the Fundación Caixa in Barcelona and Pierre Cambon, curator of the Pakistan and Afghanistan arts section at the Musée Guimet, thought that it was necessary to organise an exhibition about Afghan art as quickly as possible, making use of the collections of the Musée Guimet and other institutions. We wanted to show that dynamite in the service of obscurantism could not wipe a major part of mankind's legacy from our collective memory.

We originally chose *Afghanistan, une histoire interdite* ('Afghanistan, a forbidden history') as a title, as a challenge to the fundamentalists and their leaders. In the end we settled for a more diplomatic title: *Afghanistan, une histoire millénaire* ('Afghanistan, a timeless history'). At the entrance to the exhibition in Barcelona, opened on 2 October 2001, a film loop showed the explosive destruction of the two gigantic Buddhas of Bamiyan. We could not foresee how those images from March 2001 were a premonition of the nightmare of 11 September 2001, when the twin towers of the World Trade Center in New York were destroyed.

The Taliban regime fell before the exhibition opened in Paris on 28 February 2002. President Karzai, then still leader of the Afghan interim government, opened the exhibition along with several ministers and the then French President Jacques Chirac, precisely at the time when the discussion about the rebuilding of Afghanistan got underway, with the strong will of this country to re-establish the connections with its history and its prestigious past. The exhibition, which would move on to Tokyo and then to Houston, thereby became a symbol for better times in Afghanistan.

By 2002, rumours had begun to spread that the collections in the National Museum of Afghanistan in Kabul had not been entirely destroyed or stolen during the looting of the mid-1990s and the punitive raids of the Taliban. Hopes began to surface that objects like the finds from the graves at Tillya-tepe, last seen in 1989, before the fall of President Najibullah, might have been spared, after being hidden in the safes of the Central Bank in the grounds of the presidential palace.

When the rumours persisted, the idea arose of presenting a selection of these recovered masterpieces in Paris as follow-up to the previous exhibition. An exhibition at the Musée Guimet would mark the return of Afghanistan to the international cultural stage as a country with a prestigious past, as well as serving as a tribute to those who had the wisdom to preserve these collections in the greatest secrecy. Presidents Karzai and Chirac, conscious of the very deep international impact that such an exhibition would have, had already discussed the matter before the official announcement that the 'treasures' of the National Museum of Afghanistan had been recovered.

It was indeed only in 2004 that the world learned officially that many important artworks from the Kabul museum had been saved and were preserved in the vaults of the Central Bank. Once the vaults were opened the work of listing the recovered objects could begin. This task was undertaken by the curatorial staff of the Kabul museum and by a team of international experts, with the financial support of National Geographic. The plan for a touring exhibition with the title *The Bactrian Gold* was discussed on several occasions. On security grounds, the Afghan authorities felt it was too early to display the most priceless treasures of the country, including many gold objects, in the existing premises of the National Museum, which lay well outside the centre of Kabul.

In this first stage of discussions, the Musée Guimet and the Délégation Archéologique Française en Afghanistan (DAFA), re-established in 2003, preferred to leave the decision about a touring exhibition to the Afghan authorities, and turned their attention to the restoration of the collections from the Kabul museum, and to new excavations. Then, at the beginning of August 2005, the Afghan ambassador to France, Zalmay Haquani, let it be known that President Karzai had not forgotten his discussion with President Chirac. A few days later, together with the museum's Director Omar Khan Massoudi in Kabul, we began to work out the arrangements for an exhibition that would not be limited to the Bactrian gold alone. Our plan was to focus attention on four archaeological sites, with the aim of illustrating the role of Afghanistan as a crossroads of different cultures and civilisations.

We therefore proposed that the exhibition should begin with the presentation of three of the gold vessels from Tepe Fullol, as an illustration of the Bactrian Bronze Age civilisation around 2000 BC, as well as its relationship to Mesopotamia and the Indus culture. A more extensive section would then be devoted to Ai Khanum, a city founded as a result of the expedition of Alexander the Great. This city, where DAFA had carried out excavations up to 1979 under the direction of Paul Bernard, bore witness to the presence of Hellenism on the edges of the steppe in the fourth to the second centuries BC. Next to be shown would be a selection of jewels and other objects found in six graves at Tillya-tepe. These were excavated under the direction of the Russian archaeologist Viktor Sarianidi, and constitute a magnificent group of decorative objects, a melding of steppe art, Graeco-Roman iconography, Indian artefacts and Chinese mirrors from the early first century AD. The plan was to close the exhibition with Begram, where two sealed chambers, opened up by DAFA in 1937 and 1939 under the direction of Joseph Hackin, proved to be filled with rich Indian ivory furniture, glass, vessels and bronze objects, as well as plaster emblemata of Hellenistic origin from the first and the start of the second century AD. Paul Bernard would be responsible for the display of his excavation works at Ai Khanum. Véronique Schiltz, a specialist in Scythian art and the steppe nomads, would deal with the tombs at Tillya-tepe, which would also provide her and us with a welcome opportunity to honour Sarianidi. Pierre Cambon would present the site at Begram, while the present writer would oversee the display of the golden vessels from Tepe Fullol.

Following a formal visit at the end of August 2005 to the since deceased former King of Afghanistan, His Royal Highness Zahir Shah – who had long had a place in his heart for the French archaeologists – we were received by President Hamid Karzai. He assured us of his full support for the project, and emphasised the role played by France since 1922 in revealing and promoting the Afghan cultural heritage, in particular through the activities of DAFA and the Musée Guimet. The President also told us how happy he was that DAFA and the Musée Guimet had resumed their activities in his country since 2002.

Scientific preparations for the exhibition, in particular the selection of objects, were achieved under the best possible circumstances, thanks in no small part to the exemplary collaboration between the Musée Guimet and the museum in Kabul and its Director there, Mr Massoudi. The Vice Minister of Culture, Mr Omar Sultan, and Mrs Farida Akram provided constant support and efficient assistance.

But the practical implementation of the exhibition proved not to be an easy task. Concerns were expressed by some people about the wisdom of removing such important works from the vaults of the Central Bank. After all, they had been kept safe from greedy hands there all that time.

These concerns were fuelled by past rumours about the transportation of art treasures outside Afghanistan. In May of 1988 the French newspaper *Le Monde* went so far as to headline an article 'Soviet Army Steal Fabulous National Art Treasure'. Such concerns led to a vote by a committee of the newly installed Afghan parliament which prevented art treasures of the country leaving Afghanistan. However the Chairman of the Afghan parliament, Mr Qanuni, and the vice-Chairman, Mr Nurzai, well aware of the significance of such an exhibition for Afghanistan, gathered further information on this topic, with the aim of dealing with the concerns of some of their parliamentary colleagues. A couple of weeks later the Ministry of Information and Culture presented parlia-

ment once again with the proposal for an exhibition in Paris. This time the plan was approved. A mission subsequently departed for Kabul, on this occasion accompanied by Ernst Veen, Director of the Nationale Stichting De Nieuwe Kerk (the New Church Foundation) in Amsterdam. We were then able to discuss the concept of an exhibition to tour Europe as well as an exhibition in Amsterdam in the autumn of 2007.

We are very grateful to the Afghan authorities for choosing Paris and the Musée Guimet as the location for an official celebration of the return to public display of some of the superb objects from the National Museum of Afghanistan. We are also grateful for the support for our efforts, in collaboration with Ernst Veen from the outset, to organise an exhibition to tour Europe, with after Paris a venue in Turin and then in Amsterdam. The choice of Paris as the starting point for this touring exhibition had some historical justification since King Amanullah, some 85 years ago, when his country achieved diplomatic independence from British India after the Third Afghan War of 1919, chose French advisors to develop an education system, along with archaeological researches. He then granted France a monopoly on archaeological excavations, allowing Alfred Fouche, a renowned archaeologist, to set up DAFA in 1922. We would like to pay a tribute here to the wisdom of the Afghan royal house, who ensured that the finds from excavations were for many years divided between the museum in Kabul and DAFA, to be sent to the Musée Guimet, although the finest pieces did remain on Afghan soil. As a result of this wise decision many works were spared from looting and destruction as they were kept safe in the Musée Guimet. It is clear that the pieces stored in the vaults of the Central Bank and the Ministry of Culture represented only a small element of the original collections from the Kabul museum.

After the opening in Paris the exhibition moved on to Turin, with the support of the Fondazione San Paolo and its Director Mr Dario Disigni. It should be reported here that Italy granted asylum to several Kings of Afghanistan during the periods of turbulence that have marked the history of the country, and in particular to the recently deceased Father of the Nation, His Royal Highness King Zahir Shah. The exhibition was on view in Turin throughout the summer of 2007, and was a major success there as it had been in Paris. We have also been particularly pleased with our collaboration with De Nieuwe Kerk, which goes back right to the start of the project, and with the very friendly and energetic support of its Director Ernst Veen. It is highly significant that the exhibition is presented in Amsterdam in 2007, at a time when the Netherlands is actively contributing to the peace-making process and the reconstruction of Afghanistan. A further reason for satisfaction with the success of the exhibition in Europe is that it will be followed by a tour of the United States.

We can also be happy that the archaeological investigations are now resuming on Afghan soil with several new projects to be carried out by the Institute for the Afghan Heritage and also by DAFA. Fouche's dream – of excavating, in the ruins of ancient Balkh, Hellenistic remains which could be ascribed to Alexander the Great's city of Bactra – is materialising with the on-going excavations by DAFA at Tepe Zargaran, close to Balkh, under the direction of Roland Besenval. Recently too, remains of the Achaemenid period, preceding the conquest of Alexander, have been found located within the fortified city of Balkh. A Buddhist stupa uncovered in Tepe Zargaran, dating from the time of Soter Mega (Vima Takto),

in the first century AD, is the oldest known monument of this type in Bactria. Meanwhile in Bamiyan another team of French archaeologists led by Zemaryalai Tarzi has for the first time uncovered remains of several Buddhist monasteries at the foot of the cliffs where the famous statues, now destroyed, once stood.

These excavations, together with educational programmes, restoration work and other long-term projects, clearly demonstrate how the present exhibition fits into a general policy, including France as well as several other countries and UNESCO, to act to preserve an extraordinarily rich heritage which still remains under threat. We have to keep in mind that some groups in this part of the world still take pride in burning schools to the ground, finding that education presents an intense threat to them, particularly when it is provided to girls. This heritage, providing as it does a picture of an open Eurasia enriched by the contributions of major civilisations, with its echoes of the Mediterranean lands, India and China, profoundly touches all of those who attach importance to universal values. Surely no visitor to this exhibition can remain unmoved by these masterpieces, speaking as they do of Alexander the Great, Egypt and the Middle East of the Hellenistic period, the Indo-Greek Kings, the aristocracy of the steppes and the Roman, Parthian and Chinese empires. No-one can be insensitive to the homage paid – in what is now Afghanistan – to feminine beauty by the images of the Aphrodite of Bactria, and in particular by the superb statues of Indian women, *yakshi*, from Begram. Their charm and grace bear comparison with the most beautiful sculptures of the classical age and the Renaissance. The fact that these masterpieces have escaped the clutches of those who would have liked to plunder or destroy them adds a very special significance to the exhibition.

The exhibition in Amsterdam will display the same collection of major artworks shown in Paris and Turin. But the availability of large exhibition spaces in the Nieuwe Kerk led Ernst Veen to request Pierre Cambon and the present writer to select a few objects from the Musée Guimet corresponding to what is often defined as 'Graeco-Buddhist' art, a term used by the great scholar Alfred Foucher. Late nineteenth century finds of Buddhist sculptures, often carved from schist, recovered at various sites in the former kingdom of Gandhara in the north west of the Indian subcontinent (modern Pakistan) testify to an art which melded late Hellenistic traditions and Indian influences. Later excavations by DAFA at Hadda near Jalalabad in the south east of Afghanistan from 1923 onwards revealed Buddhist monasteries with finds exhibiting the same mix of Hellenistic-Iranian and Indian influences as in Gandhara and also at Taxila, in what is now Pakistan. These highlights of the Musée Guimet collection, the fruits of the DAFA excavations, to be shown in the Amsterdam exhibition, provide tangible evidence of the last major stage of stimulating contacts between the traditions originating from the Mediterranean world and those from India, from the first to the fifth centuries AD. As was noted earlier, the 'recovered treasures' from the National Museum of Afghanistan in Kabul demonstrate now in a clear way that this Graeco-Buddhist art is only the latest phase in a long history of contacts between the Mediterranean world and India, as well as China, before the spread of Islam from the seventh century onwards which opens a new era of large-scale contacts across the whole of Eurasia and North Africa.

The organisers of this European touring exhibition wish to express their sincere gratitude to everyone involved in its realisation. First and fore-

most our thanks go out to President Hamid Karzai and former President Jacques Chirac, to the late former King of Afghanistan His Majesty Zahir Shah, His Excellency the Minister of State Mr Arsala, and the Ministers of Culture and Information, initially Dr Sayed Makhdom Raheen, and later Mr A K Khurram. We are also much indebted to Mr Qanuni, Speaker of the Parliament, and Deputy Speaker Mr Nurzai, for encouraging the elected representatives to approve this exhibition. The Deputy Minister of Culture, Mr Omar Sultan, was charged with the direction of the project, together with his appointed expert committee. We would also like to express our thanks to the Director of the National Museum of Afghanistan in Kabul, Mr Massoudi, who played one of the most crucial roles in the entire project, as well as all his staff for their tremendous efforts in making this a collaborative success. The embassies in France, Italy and the Netherlands have made a huge contribution to the success of the exhibition in Europe, as have the staff at the French Ministry of Defence and the air force pilots who brought the objects from Kabul to Paris, assisted by the Director of DAFA Roland Besenval and his colleagues. The huge amount of restoration work completed under immense pressure of time in Paris must not go unmentioned. A group of specialists worked with dedication on a large number of objects, in collaboration with restorers brought over from the National Museum in Afghanistan. The various teams from the Musée Guimet, with Patrick Farçat (Head of Management), Caroline Arhuero (Head of Museology), Hélène Lefèvre (Head of Communications) together with their staff and my own assistant Anne Leclercq were always able to work with immense pleasure with their colleagues in Turin and Amsterdam. It is only in this way that a project of this kind, with all the inevitable hitches, can end in success. A special word of thanks must go to the department of International Relations and Publications in the person of Catherine Pouëzat, who solved a substantial number of difficulties associated with the exhibition's European tour. Thanks to the total commitment of our colleague and friend Ernst Veen, who honoured Pierre Cambon and myself by appointing us as organisers and guest conservators for this exhibition, and the highly efficient collaboration with Marlies Kleiterp, Head of Exhibitions at De Nieuwe Kerk, we are confident that the presentation of the rediscovered treasures of the National Museum of Afghanistan will enrich the Dutch metropolis with a truly memorable cultural event. We would also like to take this opportunity to express our fervent wish that the American stage of the exhibition's tour, commencing in the spring of 2008 in the National Gallery in Washington with the support of National Geographic, will also prove a resounding success. Apart from drawing the world's attention to the almost miraculous preservation of this rich part of the Afghan heritage, the exhibition will also provide an opportunity to support the valuable cultural legacy of a country that has undergone so much.



Afghanistan, rediscovered treasures

Collections of the National Museum in Kabul

Pierre Cambon

Chief Curator, Musée National des Arts Asiatiques-Guimet, Paris

Seen from the west, Afghanistan was the outermost border where Alexander the Great decided to terminate his pursuit of the Persians. The Oxus River, currently known as the Amu Darya, forms the borderline with the barbarian world. Moreover the river also forms the border of ancient Bactria, the legendary capital of which, Bactra, is cited in the Avesta, the sacred texts of the Zoroastrians (followers of the Iranian prophet Zoroaster). Seen from the east, Afghanistan was the furthest place where the Chinese pilgrim Xuanzang (602-664 AD), who went searching for the Buddhist texts of the Law in India, would ever travel. His foremost memories are of Kushana, the nomad empire which, at the beginning of our era, ended Greek domination and where Buddhism began to gain ground during the first and second century AD. He believed that Emperor Kanishka's monastery where Chinese hostages were kept was situated in Begram; Kanishka was the first emperor to have a representation of Buddha minted on the obverse of his coins. It was also in Begram that the Brit Charles Masson began his archaeological collection (1833-1837). This was the harbinger of an audacious venture in which he penetrates the Buddhist stupas of Hadda, which he thought were burial places, in search of relics from the vanished ancient kings. Afghan archaeology is characterised by treasure discoveries which illustrate the history of the country. Every single one of these findings is exceptional, from the 'Oxus treasure', parts of which can now be found in the British Museum and which became known in 1880, to the only recently unearthed treasure of Mir Zakah, a major part of which is believed to be somewhere in Japan. The exhibition focuses on the collection of 'rediscovered treasures' from the National Museum of Afghanistan in Kabul. There are four significant archaeological sites – Tepe Fullol, Ai Khanum, Tillya-tepe and Begram – which are described in detail. Not only does the exhibition focus its attention on the archaeological Afghan exploration, but the country's

ancient heritage, from the earliest times to the Kushan dynasty, when the current country of Afghanistan was the heart of an immense nomad empire extending all the way from northern India to Central Asia, also receives attention.

These 'rediscovered treasures', which illustrate the wealth of the Afghan territory and shed a whole new light on the worlds surrounding it, are also the evidence of a 'recovered memory', to which Afghans can relate and which survived nearly twenty years of civil war. They are the mainstay of the National Museum which is currently being rebuilt, a museum that can be proud of its past and traditions, but also looks towards future discoveries, excavations and researches which throughout the next few years should reveal a history of which we have only seen the tiniest part. The Délégation Archéologique Française en Afghanistan (DAFA) and the Afghan Archaeological Institute are now actively taking part in these researches.

Just like the Oxus treasure and the Mir Zakah treasure, the treasure of Tepe Fullol was discovered accidentally but, in contrast to the other two, the treasure of Tepe Fullol relates to protohistory. This treasure represents the so-called Bactrian civilisation (circa 2000 BC), situated in Afghanistan to the east of the Iranian plateau, and consists of art objects decorated with animal figures and inspired by local traditions. The golden vases display a sophisticated style and attest to the fundamental role of Bactria in the interactions between the Middle East and Balochistan or the Indus civilisation.

Ai Khanum, situated at the edge of the steppe, is an 'Alexandria' that may well have been founded by Alexander the Great. It suggests that Bactria was an outpost of the Hellenistic sedentary world. The city is the astonishing evidence of an empire which managed to develop alongside the perimeters of the Hellenistic civilisation and the thousand cities of which have been extolled many times by classical writers. Ai Khanum is the most eastern outpost of Hellenism, situated in the heart of Asia. Although, just like their Persian predecessors, the Greek conquerors ended their conquests at the edge of the steppes which were ruled by unpredictable nomads, they still put their imprint on Central Asia, where they set up the foundations for a prosperous and astonishingly flourishing empire. This empire is believed to have been decisive for the development of the local art forms and history south of the Hindu Kush. How else can 'Graeco-Buddhist art' or the 'Graeco-Afghan' school be explained? Examples of

Begram, Glass vase showing the Pharos lighthouse of Alexandria,
National Museum of Afghanistan

Photograph Musée Guimet

The vase was broken in 1980 whilst the collections were moved from the museum, but it was later repaired in France.

Denis Pipponnier, Asian Arts, part XXXVIII.

Paris, 1983, pp. 78-81



The wider environs of Afghanistan in Antiquity

both art forms have been found in Hadda and even in the recent excavations in Kabul. A number of exhibited pieces from Ai Khanum are one hundred per cent Hellenistic, although in others a symbiosis with a more eastern tradition is noticeable (plate depicting Cybele, cat. no. 23). The golden clogs from the treasure chamber of Ai Khanum (cat. nos. 5-8) remind us of the Greek mercenaries' wealth and their money. These artefacts also attest to the unique adventure of what could be the DAFA's biggest excavation project prior to the civil war, an excavation initiated by Daniel Schlumberger and requested by the king of Afghanistan. The treasure of Tillya-tepe, the last great discovery which occurred before the Russian intervention in December 1979 and the ensuing years of turmoil, consists of nomadic funeral gifts dating back to the beginning of our era. Six intact tombs reveal the unprecedented wealth of the funeral ornaments carried into death by what were clearly sovereigns. The indigenous gold and silverware, encrusted with precious stones, attest to sophistication and creativity; the few Graeco-Roman, Indian and Chinese artefacts confirm that the dead must have had dealings with the major empires of the sedentary cultures during their existence. All these artefacts confirm that we can no longer describe these sovereigns as 'barbarians'.

Tillya-tepe, 'the golden hill', absolutely deserves this description, but more important is the role it played in the development of the historical knowledge of Afghanistan. Because of the increasing pressure from the nomad people, the Scythians or Yuezhi, Graeco-Bactria completely and forever disappeared from the northern Hindu Kush map around 150 BC. The growing incoming flow of northern tribes finally resulted in the creation of the Kushan Empire (first-third century AD). Even if the exact origin of the Tillya-tepe sovereigns remains a matter of scientific controversy, because of its wealth and varied origins the treasure proves that Afghanistan then was an essential phase in the development of the thoroughfare through the steppes, a thoroughfare which crosses the whole of Eurasia, from the Black Sea and the Chersonesus (Crimea) to the Korean peninsula. The jewels remind us of Scythian gold and *kurgans* (burial mounds) from Ukraine and southern Russia, artefacts which relate to the steppes and the culture of these Iranian nomads. The crown (cat. no. 134), however, relates to Korean art from the Three Kingdoms period (first-seventh century). And although it appears rather astonishing, it is not: as a matter of fact, the Korean language belongs to the Ural-Altai language group, just like other languages from the (former) steppe people, such as Hungarian, Turkish and Mongolian. Tepe Fullol, Ai Khanum and Tillya-tepe illustrate the earliest periods of Afghan history, during which the power and cultural centres were situated to the north of the Hindu Kush. The treasure of Begram corresponds

to a later power centre, which was situated more to the south, in the Kabul river valley: the Kushan dynasty. The last Indo-Greek king of the Kabul valley, Hermaeus, probably fell around 30 AD, during the nomad tribes' offensive. The treasure, which was discovered in two sealed chambers at the Begram excavation site, at first believed to be the former Alexandria of the Caucasus, reflects the power of the Kushan dynasty. The existence of the treasure was revealed during an excavation project by the DAFA in 1937-1939. Part of the collection is in the National Museum of Kabul and the other part can be found in the Musée Guimet.

Alongside the ivory objects from India, the oldest known artefacts, and the Chinese lacquered bowls, there is glassware, bronze statues and plaster emblemata that divulge the various interactions between Alexandria and the Roman Empire. The bronze reminds us of the statuettes found in Taxila (the current Pakistan), the emblemata relates to the Chersonesus excavations (on Crimea), and the glass ware, which constitutes the oldest examples of its kind, is very similar to Graeco-Roman artefacts in its surprising diversity and sophisticated techniques. Begram is an essential detour for those interested in Graeco-Roman or Indian art forms, once again confirmed by the glass vase with the depiction of the Pharos lighthouse of Alexandria. As far as we know, this artefact is the only object with a three-dimensional representation of this building that in those days was considered one of the Seven Wonders of the Graeco-Roman World.

Although the story of Begram may be fascinating, it is filled with unsolved mysteries; our knowledge about the Kushan Empire and the surrounding civilisations is full of gaps, and this demands further research. The Graeco-Roman and Chinese artefacts have been confirmed to be from the beginning of our era, but the dating of the ivory artefacts is still a matter of controversy, whilst it is still unclear if the word 'treasure' is appropriate either. The exhibition does not only show a treasure as a whole, but also in connection to other 'rediscovered treasures'; consequently, almost 70 years later, things can be viewed from a completely different angle. The exhibition is also the occasion to revamp or clean up the treasure in order to return the artefacts to the halls of the National Museum of Kabul in the near future.

Tepe Fullol, Ai Khanum, Tillya-tepe and Begram convey the history of Afghanistan and breathe new life into an extraordinary and astonishing past. They almost certainly hold a promise of new findings, which will unquestionably find a place in the Museum of Kabul. They represent the earliest Bactrian civilisation, illustrate the Hellenistic influences on Central Asia and provide a reverberation from the steppes. Since the beginning of time they have influenced each other and in doing so they have unquestionably shaped the past of Afghanistan.

Tepe Fullol shows the Afghanistan situated between ancient Iran and India. Tillya-tepe indicates that the country was also in contact with the north, which appears to be a recurrence throughout the whole of Afghan history, because later on the country would be occupied by the Turkish kingdoms and the Mongolian Empire. Ai Khanum reveals the consequences of Alexander the Great's expedition, and the Hellenistic role in the furthest part of Asia, a paradoxical role of vital importance. From Begram we realise that the interactions with the Roman Empire gave a new impulse to Hellenism in this region. The Kushan Empire combined all these elements. During Kanishka's reign, his empire adopted Buddhism and promulgated the development of Graeco-Buddhist art, which set up the foundations for the whole of eastern Asia and deserves a separate exhibition.

Against the backdrop of the destruction of the Bamiyan Buddhas, the *Afghanistan, une histoire millénaire* ('Afghanistan: A Timeless History') exhibition in 2001 reminds us of the rich heritage of Afghan territory. Collections from France, Russia and the United States were gathered for this exhibition. Now the Afghan collections from the Museum of Kabul are reflecting the splendour and creativity from a partially rediscovered legacy. The exhibition also shows Afghanistan as a unique crossroads of civilisations in the heart of Asia. This unique character of the legacy needs to be preserved for future generations, especially considering its fragility and quality. True beauty is rather uncommon and often fleeting, but it is vital if we want to achieve inner and outer peace.



STAY ALIVE WHEN ITS
HISTORY STAY ALIVE

موزیم تاریخ کر

لست زمانی زنده میماند که بتواند فریب نگ
ریخ خویش را زنده نگیرد.

A NATION STAYS ALIVE WHEN
ITS CULTURE STAYS ALIVE.



کتاب پر پیغمبر شعبه

The National Museum of Afghanistan during the last three decades

Omar Khan Massoudi

Director of the National Museum in Kabul

The idea of a National Museum of Afghanistan was first mooted in 1919, and formed part of the process of political, cultural and social development that characterised this period of Afghan history. As far back as classical times, Afghanistan formed an important nexus which drew on and assimilated a variety of cultures, and spread their influences via the Silk Road interlinking the primary cultural centres. Ariana, broadly equivalent to modern-day Afghanistan, was destined by its geographical location to play a major historical role. The artistic forms which developed here reflected the unique character of the inhabitants, a productive blend of local traditions with Graeco-Roman, Indian and Chinese influences. These foreign influences prompted investigations by western researchers into the routes along which the Europeans and Greeks penetrated the East, particularly in Afghanistan with its wealth of remnants from the past. The National Museum was built in 1922, drawing on the results of excavations by local and foreign archaeologists. It was intended to provide a safe haven for the treasures of Afghan culture. Around 100,000 pre-Islamic and ethnographic objects were preserved in the museum. A large proportion of these objects were recorded on microfilm. The National Museum of Afghanistan handled this task with great care, so that thousands of students, teachers, official visitors, tourists and other interested parties could inspect the artworks.

But now we enter the painful period in which these treasures, of such immense historical and cultural value, became caught up in the political turmoil affecting the country, suffering terrible damage as a result. A coup d'état took place on 27 April 1978. Almost a year later, on 17 April 1979, in what proved to be a scientific and cultural disaster for Afghanistan, the objects from the National Museum were transferred to the home of the Minister Sardar Mohammad Naim Khan. The artworks were removed hastily and without care, without regard for the scientific and technical standards that ought to have governed their packaging and transport. The transfer operation took 25 days, and the objects then remained in storage for a year. Luckily the objects themselves were not broken or damaged, but the glass cases and wooden and metal containers suffered badly from the effects of unsuitable storage spaces, rain and snow. The museum pieces were then transferred to the restoration site at Darul Aman, a little outside Kabul. Following eighteen months of effort by the conservators of the National Museum and the staff of the Archaeological Institute of Afghanistan, the museum was then reopened in its original

state. The restorers had the invaluable assistance of experts and scientists from around in the country.

The Soviet invasion of Afghanistan on 26 December 1979 caused great political instability, developing into a popular uprising which eventually claimed some 2 million victims. The invasion also led to the destruction of the economy and the cultural infrastructure. The superb museum at Hadda, 8 kilometres east of Jalalabad, was plundered and burned in 1981, a loss that can never be made good. The many treasures discovered by Afghan archaeologists at Hadda, also stored at Jalalabad, were likewise looted and are lost forever. In 1988, with the security situation in Kabul continuing to deteriorate, the National Museum, in consultation with the Ministry of Culture and Information and the security forces, proposed that a number of works from the museum should be transferred to the custodianship of the then President of the Republic, Mohammad Najibullah. This proposal was accepted. Objects from a variety of collections, including those from Begram, Ai Khanum and Hadda, as well as the gold from the Bactrian treasure, were transferred to a vault in the Central Bank in the Arg, the presidential palace. Finds from Fondukistan and Bamiyan were taken to the official residence of the Minister of Culture and Information. This would mean that in the event of a problem with one of these hiding places, the other might still be safe. This approach paid off. The objects held in the National Museum at Darul Aman suffered greater damage during the civil war than those taken to the Arg and to the residence of the Minister, which have remained intact to this day. Despite the great difficulties, the hiding place of these works was not discovered throughout those years. In this way at least part of Afghan history was preserved.

The removal of the communist shackles in 1992 brought hope of a more peaceful future, but this was short-lived. The long years of war had made the lives of the population of Kabul hellish. Industry, all marks of civilisation, state provisions and private assets were plundered and left in ashes. Thousands of Afghan families had to leave their country. At the end of 1992, the personnel of the National Museum were placed on non-active status because of the dangers of the road accessing Darul Aman. Staff had been arrested, mistreated and even killed there, for a variety of reasons. On the evening of 31 December 1992, two major works from Shotorak, which had pride of place in the hallway of the upper floor of the National Museum, were stolen. One piece, carved in slate and dating from the sec-



Adoration of the Buddha by the three sons of Kashyapa
Photograph Musée Guimet

ond or third century AD, depicted a Buddhist legend, the adoration of the Buddha by the three Kashyapa brothers. This was bought in Peshawar (Pakistan) by a benevolent Japanese, and may eventually be returned to Afghanistan. The other is a bas-relief (Dipankara Jataka) 83.5 cm tall and dating from the same period. The government failed to take any action in response, and so increased the likelihood of future thefts. Only days later the windows of the main stores of the National Museum were broken, and many pieces were stolen.

On 12 March 1994 the National Museum, which was being used as a military base and defensive position, was struck by a rocket during the fighting and burst into flames. On the evening of 13 May 1994 a BBC report opined that Afghanistan may have buried its children, but should not be burying its culture. This message caused great disquiet among the national and international cultural organisations, including the United Nations, and a world-wide alarm was raised. The heritage preserved in a country's museums, in this case the National Museum of Afghanistan, a very important museum representing the nation's values and its history, must be protected at all times. International treaties insist that such heritage must never be damaged. It must not be touched, or moved to another location without the permission of the conservators, not even within the museum.

On 29 November 1994, the Special Representative of the Secretary General of the United Nations, Sotiris Mousouris, came to Kabul and visited the

leader of the group holding this area. Mr Mousouris asked his permission to implement a plan for the rebuilding and restoration of the looted museum. The Special Representative's visit provided an opportunity for journalists, diplomats and members of the United Nations and the Red Cross to visit various departments of the museum. Mr Mousouris observed that a large number of works had been stolen from the National Museum, in particular a collection including some 40,000 coins from different eras. The same was true of a large proportion of the floor coverings, including the superb Afghan carpets which had decorated the entrance hall and the display rooms. The contents of several display cases, some donated by UNESCO, had been damaged by fire. Overcome by sadness, Mr Mousouris said: 'A museum is the major storage space for history, and represents the identity of a people, so that even the smallest object must not be moved or interfered with. The removal of objects from a museum is an attack on the soul and spirituality of the nation. The destruction of these works is an irreversible disaster, and their theft and looting are an unforgivable betrayal of the people.' He made an immediate decision to throw the museum a lifeline, with the financial support of the United Nations and the cooperation of the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (UNOCHA), the only UN organisation still active in Kabul: the rest had already transferred to Islamabad in Pakistan. The National Museum's repository was provided with steel doors and a zinc roof covering. The windows were bricked up as protection against bullets, rockets and other projectiles. Despite these measures the roof was set alight during the bitter winter of 1994, and collapsed. Frescos in the Bactrian Hall and the Hall of the Ghaznavids were completely destroyed. Attempts were made to prevent snow and rainwater pene-

An example of the work of Afghan archaeologists: the treasure of Tillya-tepe

The treasure of Tillya-tepe, also known as the Bactrian Treasure, was discovered in the ruined fire worshippers' temple erected in the second century BC behind the abandoned city of Sheberghan in northern Afghanistan. The Soviet Union's Afghan Archaeological Council conducted excavations at Tillya-tepe in the winter of 1978-1979 under the direction of Viktor Sarianidi. 21,618 gold, silver and ivory objects were found in the six graves at Tillya-tepe. The tombs were those of wealthy nomad families, interred at the start of the Christian era. The burial cists were of very simple manufacture. The wooden lids had long since vanished, but the objects within remained undamaged and were of quite exceptional quality. There were thousands of silver crescents, gold chains, a tree decorated with pearls, an engraved coin showing a mythological crea-

ture, an image of Aphrodite, a belt clasp depicting a man on a dolphin, a winged dragon, a gold crown and Roman, Parthian and Greek coins. The gold objects were all photographed and listed by the Soviet Union's Afghan Archaeological Council, and then presented to the National Museum by the Afghan Archaeological Department in 1979.

Part of the treasure was exhibited in the National Museum in 1980, but in 1985 the objects were moved as a precaution to the Koti Baghcheh palace. As has already been described, they were placed in the vaults of the Central Bank of Afghanistan in 1988. In July 1991 a limited number of objects from the collection were exhibited for one day at the Koti Baghcheh palace. They were then withdrawn from public view. Only the museum staff who had brought the objects to the Central Bank were aware of their hiding place, which kept them safe from terror, violence, civil war and the Taliban. At the end of 1992 officials visited the site to verify the existence of the crates. Numerous rumours circulated about the

objects: they had been stolen, they had been sold on the black market, they had been melted down. Those who knew the truth kept their silence until 2002, when at the instigation of the Director of Museums in the Ministry of Culture and Information, a delegation was sent to the vaults of the Central Bank to investigate. The delegation reported that the crates were still sealed. In 2003 the Afghan government confirmed that the objects from Tillya-tepe were intact and undisturbed. In March 2004 the Minister of Culture, Information and Tourism reached an agreement with the American National Geographic Society on listing the works in the National Museum. In April 2004 a start was made on listing the objects in the vaults of the Central Bank, with a record card in the Dari language and English for each item. Present on the first day of this work were Viktor Sarianidi, Dr Fredrik Hiebert (representing National Geographic), Carla Grissman (who had worked with the National Museum since 1973) together with senior officials and members of the special committees of the National Museum and the Afghan Archaeological Institute.

22,607 objects were listed, 20,587 of them from Tillya-tepe. The remainder came from various sites including Begram, Hadda, Fondukistan, Tepe Fullol, Ai Khanum and Surkh Kotal. There was also an assembly of gold and silver coins. The objects which had not been moved were all sadly lost. Local and foreign experts were called upon for assistance in listing the museum collections and setting up a database to record them. The National Geographic Society, UNESCO and SPACH, in collaboration with the management of the National Museum, began the work of digitalising the collections, one of the focal points of the museum's programme of works.



Tillya-tepe, grave VI, crown (cat. no. 134)
Photograph Musée Guimet

trating the storerooms, using locally available materials like clay/straw mortar. The Society for the Preservation of Afghanistan's Cultural Heritage (SPACH) was established in the same year, with indirect support from UNESCO. During that winter a team was brought together whose task would be to rescue the collections on the upper storey of the museum from the rubble, taking a scientific approach. Around 3000 pieces, in stone, terracotta and metal, many of them damaged, were saved and placed in the stores.

In 1996 the Ministry of Culture and Information decided to remove the remainder of the works from the National Museum. Special committees were established to implement the project, dealing with record-keeping, restoration, photography, packing, checking, transport and administration. A coordinating committee was also set up. All these committees were staffed by personnel from the National Museum and the Archaeological Institute. With the assistance of the National Security Forces they managed to complete their task within six months. They worked in the storerooms by torchlight in an atmosphere choking with dust. Their exhaustion could be seen on their faces. Many developed allergies

and had to cover their faces and mouths with cloths. A total of 70 people were engaged in the work of recording, photographing and packing the works, some of which were then transferred to the Hotel Kabul in the centre of the city. Following the installation of the Taliban regime in Kabul, the pieces stored in the hotel were happily spared, but the museum's stores were looted and destroyed. Some months later the work of preparing an inventory of the remaining works in the stores was able to resume, with the aid of equipment provided by SPACH.

At the start of 2001 the National Museum were faced with a further disaster as the Taliban decided that all images must be destroyed. A special group was charged with this task. They destroyed around 2500 works of art. In March of 2001 they blew up the giant Buddha statues at Bamiyan, 38 and 55 metres tall. These barbaric acts, which filled the heart of every decent Afghan with anger, represented an irreplaceable loss. Terrible damage was caused at every archaeological site in the country. Neither the coming generations of Afghans nor human history will forget this era of tyranny and destruction.

Historical overview of the National Museum of Afghanistan

On his death in 1919, King Habibullah Khan (reigned 1901-1919) left behind a small collection of manuscripts as well as various archives, coins, family items, weapons, miniatures and other works of art. These objects were collected together by the royal family and kept in various addresses in the fashionable Baghe Bala quarter.

A few years later, King Amanullah Khan (reigned 1919-1929) transferred the collection to a building within the palace grounds. In 1931 the collection was placed in its present home at Darul Aman. During the subsequent decades the collections in the National Museum were gradually expanded with archaeological finds from around Afghanistan.

The first damage to the National Museum occurred after the coup d'état of 27 April 1978. In 1979 the National Museum's collections were transferred to the residence of Minister Sardar Mohammad Naim Khan, while the museum building was occupied by the

Ministry of Defence. In 1980 the collections returned once again to Darul Aman.

In 1989 the National Museum was closed on the orders of President Najibullah. Some works were transferred to the Arg, the presidential palace, while others were taken for protection to the official residence of the Minister of Culture and Information. However the majority remained in the National Museum.

Between 1992 and 1994, Kabul was laid waste in guerrilla fighting and the museum was looted.

In 1995 the objects found in the rubble of the museum were listed.

In 1996, a week before the Taliban seized power, around 3500 objects were transferred to the Hotel Kabul.

In 1997 the National Museum closed its doors, while the objects stored in the Hotel Kabul were transferred to the official residence of the Minister of Culture and Information.

Between 1998 and 2000 the work of listing the objects continued in the museum in Kabul.

At the start of 2001 the Buddha statues of Bamiyan were destroyed, as were the artefacts stored in the Ministry of Culture and Infor-

mation and the National Museum at Darul Aman.

The work of rebuilding the museum began in 2003, and continues to this day. The conservation laboratories and the photographic department were partly re-equipped and taken back into use.

International experts and the museum staff attempted to reconstruct and restore the damaged works, while many other objects required careful cleaning. These operations included the restoration of the statue of Kanishka from Surkh Kotal and the Bodhisattva from Tepe Marjan, on the initiative of the Musée Guimet in Paris. The work of repairing ceramic objects was also resumed. The first exhibition in the rebuilt museum was devoted to objects from the eastern province of Nuristan.

Restoration activities in Kabul, April 2003: a new lease of life for the statue of Kanishka

Pierre Cambon

The assignment I was given in April 2003 was made possible by a special loan to the Musée Guimet by the French Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and symbolised the return of peace to Afghanistan and the will of the French nation to assist in the rebuilding of that country. This assignment was also the first relating to the restoration of the collections in the National Museum in Kabul. In that highly-charged emotional context, with rubble surrounding the museum and the shock of twenty years of war, ending with the crisis at Bamiyan, against a backdrop of provocation and self-destruction, my proposal to Mr Massoudi was that the French team should make an immediate start on the most difficult cases: the statue of Kanishka from Surkh Kotal and the Bodhisattva from Tepe Marjan, irrationally destroyed in March 2001. The excavation of these sites in the 1930s and 1950s was conducted by the Délégation Archéologique Française en Afghanistan (DAFA). The archive in Paris contained photographs from the Musée Guimet and others I had taken myself during my work in Kabul on behalf of the World Heritage Centre in the spring of 1995, as a result of the personal initiative of the Director General of UNESCO, Federico Mayor.

For the operation to have any chance of success I thought it essential that Béatrice Beillard and Daniel Ibled be appointed as restorers, both having demonstrated their talents during the restoration of the Afghan collections in Paris. I had been involved in that project during the reorganisation of the Afghan department prior to the reopening of the Musée Guimet in January 2001. The statue of Kanishka and the Bodhisattva were themselves also powerful symbols representing the National Museum, whose hallway they had decorated since their discovery. In March 2001 they had been systematically smashed to pieces with a sledgehammer. The former statue was in limestone, the

latter in unfired clay. It seemed that their fate was sealed. Nevertheless the fragments, however shapeless their appearance, were carefully preserved by the museum staff. The damaged fragments from the Surkh Kotal find were placed together in three cases, where the pieces of the Kanishka statue and that of another Kushana ruler lay jumbled together. In the face of many difficulties and some unpleasant surprises, the puzzle was painstakingly reassembled over the course of two weeks. It emerged that the Bodhisattva statue from Tepe Marjan had been reinforced using methods then current in the Soviet Union, using synthetic resins. Nevertheless the result of all this effort was a resounding success, so much so that the staff from the Kabul museum were encouraged to restore the statue of the Kushana ruler without awaiting the planned return in the autumn of the French team. Since that time the National Museum have adopted a systematic restoration policy, albeit without the preparatory phase of documentation and team selection which would be required to carry out the work with optimal efficiency.

Survey of the objects in the National Museum of Afghanistan

When the first crates containing items from the National Museum were opened in the Arg or presidential palace, a new method was adopted in drawing up the inventory. Experts from the museum and the Archaeological Institute, including heads of department, restorers, photographers and computer experts were assisted by foreign specialists in the collation of information and the drafting of record cards in Dari and English.

This new system, meeting international standards for museums, used the former methods of the National Museum to monitor and protect the objects. In accordance with the museum's new policy, each object was separately described, classified, measured and photographed. The need to repair each item was individually assessed. Each record card was signed by the appointed manager, and the objects were then packed away together with a copy of their record card. Two systems were adopted for the management of the objects: one dealing with the receipt of the items, to ensure better protection, and one dealing with computer records, in order to facilitate future access by researchers.



2003, statue of Emperor Kanishka
from Surkh Kotal, during reconstruction
Photograph Pierre Cambon

Chronology of the excavations

Pierre Cambon

1922	Agreements between France and Afghanistan, on the initiative of King Amanullah, for the foundation of a Délégation Archéologique Française en Afghanistan, with Alfred Foucher as the first Director. The DAFA were granted sole rights to the excavations for a period of thirty years. The distribution of the finds between the two countries was set down contractually.	1951	Excavations at Mundigak, Bronze Age (Jean-Marie Casal).
1924	Excavations in Balkh commenced by Alfred Foucher; first project by Joseph Hackin in Afghanistan.	1952	Excavations at Surkh Kotal, from the time of the Kushan dynasty (first and second century AD) (Daniel Schlumberger).
1926	Archaeological reconnaissance of the northeast by Jules Barthoux; start of the Hadda excavations.	1957	Archaeological investigation of the minaret of Jam, from the time of the Ghorids (twelfth to the start of the thirteenth centuries) (André Maricq).
1928	Conclusion of excavations by Barthoux in Hadda.	1964	Ai Khanum, preliminary prospecting (Daniel Schlumberger, Paul Bernard).
1930	Archaeological investigations in Bamiyan (Joseph Hackin, Jean Carl).	1965	First excavation at Ai Khanum (Paul Bernard).
1932	Publication by Joseph Hackin, <i>L'œuvre de la DAFA (1922-1932)</i> , Tokyo 1933.	1966	First excavations by the Archaeological Institute of Afghanistan, at Hadda.
1934	Excavations at Khair-khaneh, a shrine dating from the time of the Hindu Shahi Dynasty (circa 870-1026).	1976	Excavations at Shortughai (Henri Paul Francfort).
1936	Archaeological reconnaissance of Sistan province in western Afghanistan (Islamic and proto-historical sites).	1978	Discovery of the treasure of Tillya-tepe, a Soviet-Afghan excavation.
1937	Discovery of the Begram treasure; excavations in Fondukistan and Shotorak, Buddhist sites.	1982	Suspension of the agreements establishing the DAFA.
1946	New negotiations over the agreements instituting the DAFA (the exclusivity clause was removed).	2003	Restitution of the DAFA. The stipulations about the allocation of finds were not included this time. Excavations at Bamiyan (Zemaryalai Tarzi).
1949	Excavation of Lashkari-bazar, from the time of the Ghaznavids and Ghorids (tenth to start of thirteenth centuries) (Daniel Schlumberger).	2004	Start of excavations at Balkh (Tepe Zargaran) (Roland Besenval).
		2005	Excavation of the Al-Ghata stupa in Wardak province, and continuation of excavations at Balkh: Graeco-Kushan complex (first to third century AD), levels from the time of the Achaemenids (sixth to fourth century BC).



The most important excavations in Afghanistan and its immediate environs

Timeline

Pierre Cambon

Year	Europe	Middle East	Iran	Afghanistan	India	Central Asia	Far East
		West	East	North	South	West	East
7000	Neolithic (7000-4000)			Neolithic (7000-5000) Aq Kupruk		Neolithic (7000-4500) Mehrgarh I, II	
6000		Ras Shamra	Copper Age			Mehrgarh III (5000-3500)	
5000							
4000							
3000	Bronze Age (3000-1500)		Bronze Age (3300-2500) Helmand culture		Bronze Age (3300-2500) Helmand culture	Bronze Age (3500-2500) Mehrgarh IV-VII	
2500	Minoan civilisation (Crete, 3000-1100)		Shahr-i Sokhta		Mundigak IV		
2000		Dynasty of Ur III (2120-2000) and Isin-Larsa (2025-1763)	Hissar III culture	Bactrian civilisation Dashly Shortughai Settlement		Indus civilisation (2500-1800)	
1500	Mycenaean civilization (Peloponnesus, 1600-1100)	Invasions of the Sea peoples	Ziggurat of Chogha Zanbil			Iron Age Tillya-tepe	Bronze Age (2000-500)
1000		Ashurbanipal (668-627)		Zoroaster (6th century)		Buddha (536-480)	
500	Greek city states (7th-4th century)			Achaemenid Empire (550-331)		Magadha Kingdom	Zhou Dynasty (1046-771)
400	Roman Empire / Republic (4th-1st century)			Alexander the Great (356-323)			Iron Age (500)
300				Seleucid Empire (331-175)			Warring States Period (475-221)
250				Parthian Empire			
200		Parthian Empire Mithridates (171-138)		Bactrian Empire			
150					Indo-Greek Empires Menander (160-140)	Kingdoms of Sunga and Kanva	Qin Dynasty (221-207)
100	Julius Caesar (100-44)			Nomadic invasions Sakas (Scythians)			Early Han Dynasty (206 BC-25 AD)
50	Augustus Caesar (27 BC-14 AD)	Orodes II defeats the Roman consul Crassus at Carrhae (53 BC)		Yuezhi (Kushana)	Nomadic invasions (Indo-Scythians) (Indo-Parthians)		Fall of the Xiongnu (Emperor Wu-ti (141-87 BC))
							Migration of the Yuezhi (The rise of Buddhism)

Year	Europe	Middle East	Iran	Afghanistan	India	Central Asia	Far East
						Xinjiang	
0					Kushan Empire (1st-3rd century) Kanishka (78?)		
50					Gandhara School	Mathura School	
100	Roman Empire (1st-5th century)		Campaigns of Trajan (113-117) and Septimius Severus (198-200)				Chinese expansion
200			Sasanian Empire (224-651) Shapur I takes emperor Valerian prisoner (260)		Hadda School		
300	Constantine the Great founds Constantinople (330) Byzantine Empire (330-1453)		Shapur II (309-379)	Kushan-Sasanian kingdoms of the Kidarites		Gupta-Empire (320-510)	Age of the Six Dynasties (221-581)
400	Huns in Russia, Eastern and Central Europe (4th-5th century)			Invasions of the Hephthalites (White Huns) (Mihirakula)			
500		Khosrow I (531-579)		West-Turks		Post-Gupta period	West-Turks Chinese expansion (c. 630-c. 750)
600	Merovingians (476-750) and Carolingians in Western Europe (750-887)		Omayyad Caliphate (661-750) Damascus		Turki Shahi		Sui Dynasty (581-618) Tang Dynasty (618-907) Monk Xuanzang (7th century)
700						Pala Dynasty (8th-11th century)	
750	Charlemagne (reign 768-814)			Abbasid revolution			Defeat of the Chinese at Talas (751)
800		Abbasid Caliphate (750-1258) Bagdad					Age of the Five Dynasties (907-960) Northern Song Dynasty (906-1126)
900	Kievan Rus in Russia (985-1169)			Samanid Dynasty (874-999)	Hindu Shahi		
1000	Defeat of the Byzantines against the Seljuks at Manzikert, end of Byzantine dominance in Asia			Seljuk Sultanate (1055-1194)	Mahmud of Ghazni (998-1030)		Sena Dynasty (11th-12th century)
1100	Crusades (1095-1291) Italian City States (from 11th century)			Ghaznavid Dynasty (10th-11th century) Ghorid Dynasty (12th-early 13th century)		Islamic invasions	
1200			Genghis Khan (c. 1162-1227) Mongol Empire (Il-Khanate) (1256-1335)	Founder: Hülegü Khan (c. 1217-1265), grandson of Genghis Khan, brother of Kublai Khan	The Mongols reach Afghanistan (1221) Travels of Marco Polo (from 1271)	Sultanate of Delhi (1206-1526)	Temüjin (Genghis Khan) (c. 1167-1227) Yuan Dynasty (1279-1368) (Mongol dynasty) Kublai Khan (1215-1294), grandson of Genghis Khan and brother to Hülegü Khan
1300		Ottoman Empire (c. 1290-1923)	Tamerlan (Timur Lenk) (1336-1405) Timurid Empire (Turkish-Mongol Empire) (1370-1506)				



The treasure of Tepe Fullol

Jean-François Jarrige

Discovery, and preliminary hypothesis

In 1972 Maurizio Tosi and Rauf Wardak published a detailed article describing the discovery of the Tepe Fullol treasure (Tosi – Wardak 1972). On 5 July 1966 a group of farmers had made the chance discovery of a hoard of gold and silver bowls near a mountain pass two kilometres from the village of Fullol in northeast Afghanistan. Wishing to divide the booty equally among themselves, the finders hacked the bowls into equal pieces with an axe. However, local government agencies soon arrived on the scene and managed to recover five gold and seven silver vessels as well as a number of fragments. These were then entrusted to Dr Wardak from the National Museum in Kabul. Dr Wardak carried out a small excavation at the claimed location of the find, a 14 metre by 8 metre hillock known locally as the Kosh Tapa. This revealed no further artefacts; however a skeleton in very poor condition was exposed, in a bent posture with the head oriented towards the north. The location of a burial at the claimed site of the Fullol discovery, which could be linked to pre-Islamic traditions through the flexed posture and the orientation of the head, appeared to suggest that the gold and silver bowls were grave goods. Several of the bowls were decorated with geometric motifs or animal figures, primarily friezes with bulls, oxen and wild boars. One fragment also showed a bird between two snakes. The decoration shows the use of a variety of techniques including engraving, hammering and repoussé work.

The discovery of these objects came as a great surprise, all the more so since apart from some of the geometric ornamentation they bore little resemblance to other known finds from Afghanistan or the neighbouring regions. The archaeological reference material available in Afghanistan at that time came primarily from the site at Mundigak in the Kandahar region to the west of Afghanistan. Excavations were conducted here in the 1950s under the direction of Jean-Marie Casal in the context of the

activities of the Délégation Archéologique Française en Afghanistan (DAFA). A settlement was exposed dating from the fourth millennium BC. During the first half of the third millennium BC Mundigak had grown to true city status, covering an area of some fifty hectares and already featuring a variety of monumental construction works and cornciced defences (Casal 1961). The exhibition *Afghanistan, une histoire millénaire*, in the Musée Guimet in 2002 put on display a collection of objects from Mundigak which the Musée had held in storage. Ten years after the completion of the excavations at Mundigak a team of Italian archaeologists went to work at the site of Shahr-i Sokhta in Sistan in Iran, the delta region of the Helmand river, close to the Afghan border. These excavations revealed a town of some 100 hectares, displaying much cultural affinity with the golden age of Mundigak, between 3000 and 2500 BC. Maurizio Tosi, who excavated Shahr-i Sokhta, suggested that these two major sites should be linked as forming part of a Helmand culture. The trading and administrative activities of this culture had clearly played a significant role in contacts between Proto-Elamite Iran and the sites in Balochistan and the Indus valley, dating from the end of the fourth millennium BC to around halfway through the third millennium BC. Remnants of the workshops of precious stone polishers, testifying to the importance of lapis lazuli, are found in both Mundigak and Shahr-i Sokhta. The sources of this blue mineral are near Sar-i Sang in Badakhshan province in northeast Afghanistan. It is well known that lapis lazuli from Afghanistan was highly sought after in Mesopotamia throughout the third millennium BC. Tepe Fullol is barely 200 km from the lapis lazuli quarries of Sar-i Sang. The rich assembly of gold and silver bowls from Fullol may therefore have been a result of exchanges with areas of western Asia, revolving in particular around the trade in lapis lazuli. Nevertheless it appears that the majority of the gold and silver vessels from Fullol have a cultural background differing from that of Mundigak and Shahr-i Sokhta, so that they do not appear to have been made at the time of the trade contacts between the two sites in the Helmand system and the west.

Some have therefore given the Tepe Fullol vessels a later date based on comparisons with gold and silver vessels from the royal tombs at Marlik in the north of Iran. However the decoration from Marlik, with rearing bulls and stylised trees inspired by Babylonian art of the twelfth century BC, bears only a distant resemblance to the ornamentation of the Tepe

The Quetta finds, gold beaker
1900 BC
Photograph Ravaux

Fullol vessels. Several experts, in particular Tosi in his article with Wardak, but also P Amiet, have emphasised that some of the decoration from the Tepe Fullol vessels, and in particular the bearded bulls, displays similarities with iconographic themes from Mesopotamia at the end of the third and the start of the second millennium BC (the Ur III and Isin-Larsa dynasties) (Amiet 1986). However the same authors have also acknowledged that the geometrical motifs – cruciform or stepped, engraved or repoussé – on two of the Tepe Fullol vessels, one of which can be seen in this exhibition, also resemble earlier ceramic decorations, in a style from the first half of the third millennium BC, referred to as Namazga III or Quetta. This style is also well represented in Mundigak and Shahr-i Sokhta.

In summary therefore: it was thought that the Tepe Fullol 'treasure' could represent a secret cache or a graveyard containing objects from several periods, some dating back as far as 2800 or 2500 BC and others from around 2000 BC.

Placing Tepe Fullol within a new cultural region

K R Maxwell-Hyslop was the first to convincingly link the Tepe Fullol vessels with a complex of new finds from the end of the third and the start of the second millennium BC (Maxwell-Hyslop 1982). The exhibi-

tion *Afghanistan, une histoire millénaire* in the Musée Guimet in 2002 brought together a selection of objects forming part of what was then defined as an extensive cultural region taking in a major part of Afghanistan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan, as well as areas of eastern Iran and parts of Balochistan as far as the western side of the Indus valley. This is not the place for an exhaustive discussion of such a large topic. Let us just mention that a series of new finds from the 1970s onwards, and excavations in Dashly-tepe in Afghanistan, Sappalitepa and Djarkutan in Uzbekistan, and Togolok-depe and Gonur-depe in Turkmenistan, have revealed the existence of a whole network of settlements, sometimes extending over 40 hectares. These were walled cities containing a complex of buildings set in a symmetrical plan. The ground plans of some of these structures can be interpreted as palaces and religious buildings. On the periphery lay burial grounds, producing a wealth of grave goods where they had not been robbed: undoubtedly prestigious objects in stone, copper, gold and silver, of a richness never previously encountered in any of these regions. It is largely thanks to Viktor Sarianidi that an exceptionally coherent set of new data covering this period is now available, for both Afghanistan and Turkmenistan (Sarianidi 1998, 2002).

Grave goods have been found at the Shahdad graveyard in eastern Iran which display many similarities with the finds from the sites in the Murghab delta and at the Dashly oasis (Hakemi 1997). Several sites (such



Afghanistan and wider environs at the time of Tepe Fullol



Fullol Treasure, silver beaker
National Museum of Afghanistan
Photograph Musée Guimet



as Sibri) and graveyards (particularly Mehrgarh VIII and Dauda Damb) are known in Pakistani Balochistan, to the west of the Indus valley, and show significant affinity with excavated finds from Afghanistan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan (C Jarrige et al. 1995). Numerous objects were found accidentally during construction work at Quetta in Balochistan, including various gold items. These became known as the 'Quetta treasure'. A skeleton was found in the same pit, indicating that this was a graveyard. The 'treasure' was therefore made up of grave goods, which, following comparison with the finds from the Mehrgarh VIII grave-

yards, belong to the same cultural complex that we have just mentioned (Jarrige – Hassan 1989).

It was later observed that combinations of stone objects – 'sceptres', carved discs and miniature columns – are placed in the same manner in tombs and cenotaphs throughout the area from Turkmenistan to the west of the Indus valley, in particular in the Mehrgarh VIII graveyards and the burial deposit from which the Quetta finds came. The individual objects from within this area also displayed many similarities. The stone images, most commonly of steatite or chlorite, with hands and faces of alabaster and garments reminiscent of the *kaunakes* (woollen skirts) of Mesopotamia, are the most striking among the allegorical objects from this cultural region. Several of these images were to be seen in the exhibition *Afghanistan, une histoire millénaire* (catalogue RMN 2002, figs. 8-11). The same figure appears on various different objects, including a silver *pyxis* (a lidded box) from Gonur-depe. It is difficult to say who is repre-



'Bactrian Princess', calcite and soapstone
Musée du Louvre, Département des Antiquités Orientales,
AO 22918
Photograph Réunion des Musées Nationaux



'Bactrian Princess', calcite and soapstone
Musée du Louvre, Département des Antiquités Orientales,
AO 31917
Photograph Réunion des Musées Nationaux

sented in these images, which are almost always encountered in funerary contexts. The area of distribution is certainly very extensive, with one example found in the Quetta 'treasure' while in Harappa, a major city of the Indus civilisation, fragments of a head covering usually associated with this type of sculpture were found in a layer dating from period III of the Indus civilisation at the end of the third millennium BC (Meadow, lecture to the Académie des Inscriptions et Belles-Lettres 2005).

Series of metal seals from this area display a wide range of iconographic themes, probably reflecting a religious ideology, offering many parallels with similar objects from several sites from the Middle East (Francfort 1992). Among them one notices many seal cylinders with parallels in Mesopotamia and Elam, distinguished by the stamp on the base. A similar type was found at the eastern limit of this cultural complex on the border of the Indus valley, in particular at the site of Sibri (C Jarrige et al. 1995, pp. 360, 414).

All the new discoveries of the last thirty years have revealed an extended, relatively homogeneous cultural entity in various areas of Central Asia and the Indo-Iranian border regions. While this entity has its original characteristics, it also to a large degree bears the marks of many and diverse outside influences. Furthermore, as well as these finds, originating from sites of more or less supervised excavations, there are also countless remarkable objects which have found their way on to the international art market via clandestine excavations and have been added to public or private collections.

The Tepe Fullol vessels – a find that caused immense surprise – can now be understood within a better-known cultural context. They can be put now on a rather large list of objects including gold and silver bowls, some with geometric motifs like the two Fullol vessels, some with narrative scenes depicting banquets, hunting parties and work in the fields (Francfort 2003, Francfort 2005 A). The 1988 exhibition in the Musée Guimet *Les cités oubliées de l'Indus* ('Forgotten cities of the Indus', AFAA catalogue 1988) provided an opportunity to view the rich grave goods of the Quetta treasure. One of the objects on view was a footed gold drinking beaker. A frieze showing beasts of prey was applied as decoration, with the skin worked in exactly the same way as the wild bulls on the gold vessels from Tepe Fullol (Jarrige 1988, 115; Jarrige – Hassan 1989, figs. 6 & 7).

While the Tepe Fullol vessels, like most bowls from that extensive cultural region, have something of a local character, they also show signs of outside influences. Researchers had indeed noted these influences shortly after the discovery, in particular the representations of bearded bulls reminiscent, as has been noted, of a generally recognised theme from Mesopotamia. The representation of a tree on a mountain on the golden drinking beaker from Tepe Fullol showing wild boars can be linked to decorations from Mesopotamian seals. The same theme is also found on a silver vessel from a burial tomb from Gonur-depe in Turkmenistan. Among the various animals shown on this vessel some can be compared with those from Tepe Fullol bowls. They are shown against the background of a landscape symbolised by trees on mountains (Francfort 2005 B).

We do hope that more bowls from Fullol will find their way back to the National Museum of Afghanistan in Kabul. Nevertheless the three examples which have been so far recovered are of a great symbolic value. They form part of the first group of objects heralding the discovery of a previously unknown larger cultural complex, whose precise definition has formed a major topic of expert debate for more than 20 years. Some of our Anglo-Saxon colleagues use denomination going back as early as Hellenistic geography, with frequent references to the Bronze Age Bactria-Margiana Archaeological Complex (BMAC), while Henri-Paul Francfort proposed the adoption of the term 'Oxus civilisation'. This may be too restrictive, given the immense geographical area covered by this cultural complex. However it is also the case with the term Indus civilisa-



< Allegorical figure with scarring, chlorite, calcite and meteoric iron, Fars or Bactria
 Musée du Louvre, Département des Antiquités Orientales,
 AO 21104
 Photograph Réunion des Musées Nationaux

Decorated silver beaker, Gonur-depe (Turkmenistan)
 Photograph Musée Guimet (V Sarianidi)

tion which has been adopted to indicate a cultural complex extending well beyond the geographical boundaries of the Indus valley. The term 'Oxus cultural complex' will be adopted in what follows, in full awareness of the aforementioned limitations.

The Oxus cultural complex and its relationship with the Indus culture

As we have explained, the Oxus cultural complex expanded as far east as the western side of the Indus valley in a period between 2200 and 1800 BC (Jarrige – Hassan 1989). We also now know that a set of finds, often defined as 'exotic' objects, recovered in the cities of the Indus civilisation, such as seal cylinders, various weapons and metal objects, can be to-day associated with this previously unknown Oxus cultural complex. Questions arise about the contacts there may have been between the Indus civilisation and the Oxus cultural complex. Our excavations at the site of Nausharo, close to Mehrgarh on the fringes of the Indus valley, cast new light on this question. After period I, dated to the first half of the third millennium BC, Nausharo grew during periods II III and IV to form an agglomeration which was part of the Indus civilisation. However new elements appearing at the start of period IV, dating at the earliest from around 2200 BC, can also be linked with the Oxus cultural sys-

tem. These finds come from layers with yielded material predominantly belonging to the Indus civilisation. It is notable that this period IV falls within the third main period of the Indus civilisation, from around 2200 to 1900 BC, a period marking the urban and economical climax of the great Indus cities such as Mohenjo-daro and Harappa.

The occurrence around Nausharo and Mehrgarh of other sites with artefacts showing a strong affinity with some of those from the Oxus cultural complex has already been indicated, but it can also be associated with objects characteristic of the Indus civilisation (Jarrige – Quivron 1999). It is therefore now possible to assert that two groups with very different cultural backgrounds lived together – apparently peacefully – on the western border of the Indus valley from around 2200 to 1900 BC. Far from the Indus valley, in Gonur-depe in Turkmenistan, a cylinder seal of the Mesopotamian type in the style of Ur III was found by Sarianidi and can be dated to the end of the third millennium BC. At the same site he also found a seal bearing an image of an elephant below an inscription in the script of the Indus civilisation (Francfort 2005 B).

Such an increase in the available data allows an investigation of the types of contacts which took place between the groups associated with this Oxus cultural complex – first brought to light by the vessels from Tepe Fullol – and the inhabitants of the cities of the Indus civilisation. The archaeologists directing the major excavations of the first half of the twentieth century in what is now Pakistan were struck by the extent of



Decorated silver beaker, cast
Gonur-depe (Turkmenistan)
Photograph Musée Guimet (V Sarianidi)

urbanisation of the Indus civilisation, their administrative capabilities and the obvious economic prosperity. A notion quickly took root among many specialists that this civilisation between 2500 and 1800 BC had rigid conservative tendencies, so that any form of development was inhibited and all significant influence from outside was rejected. However, a good deal of the recent research, in particular the work in Nausharo mentioned above, and also the reassessment of the Harappa excavations by an American team, have shown clearly that the Indus culture did indeed undergo development over the course of time. The previous large excavations were in general limited to the exposure of the upper layers. Now that we have a much better understanding of the stratigraphy of several sites of the Indus civilisation, we understand that cities like Mohenjo-daro and Harappa, discovered during the major excavations of the first half of the twentieth century, only grew to metropolis status in the course of the third major era of the Indus culture, that is between around 2200 and 1900 BC. These relatively recent findings, showing that the successive periods of the Indus civilisation were marked by important changes, have opened the way to investigations into the internal and external factors, such as the Oxus cultural complex, contributing to the evolution of the Indus civilisation.

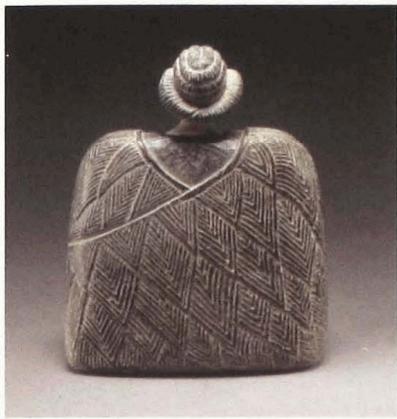
The Indus culture and Mesopotamia, from the third to the start of the second millennium BC

We have already mentioned the existence of sites such as Mundigak and Shahr-i Sokhta in around 3000 BC. These sites which could be part of a Helmand cultural system have provided us with clear evidence of contacts between the Proto-Elamite world in Iran and cultures from Balochistan (southwest Pakistan) and Sindh (southeast Pakistan). These

sites also gave evidence of work using the lapis lazuli from the mines of Sar-i Sang (Afghan Badakhshan). The strong links of Mundigak during its final period (IV C) with Mehrgarh (period VII C) and Nausharo (I C) between 2700 and 2600 BC tend to confirm that neither the Helmand culture sites such as Shahr-i Sokhta and Mundigak nor many sites in the upper valleys of Balochistan were occupied after 2500. These observations are based on intensive comparative research on the ceramics from these different sites. We can now refute the opinion of some scholars who still assert, without providing significant evidence, that Mundigak and Shahr-i Sokhta were still occupied at a later date. With a more precise chronology for these regions, it becomes evident that the sites of the Helmand cultural system are no longer occupied when what we call the Indus civilisation appears.

It is probably not a coincidence that during the first stage of this civilisation between 2500 and 2400 BC, a settlement with all the features of the Indus civilisation was founded at Shortughai, in northeast Afghanistan just at the border with Tajikistan and close to the confluence of the Oxus and the Kokcha river (the source of which is near the mines of Sar-i Sang (Francfort 1989). This seems to indicate that groups of people belonging to the Indus civilisation began just after 2500 BC to play a significant role in trading contacts with western Asia, resulting from the trade in lapis lazuli. The specialists have been in agreement for years that the vast area of diffusion of the Indus civilisation can be connected with the geographical term 'Meluhha', which occurs on Mesopotamian clay tablets from the third millennium BC. The reports by Sargon of Akkad from around 2300 BC concerning boats from Meluhha, Magan (Oman) and Dilmun (Bahrain and the island of Failaka, off Kuwait) have been well-known for a long time. It is also known, again thanks to the Mesopotamian clay tablets, that the successors of Sargon undertook military expeditions extending to the borders of Meluhha (Sollberger 1970; Maxwell-Hyslop 1982). Texts from the end of the third millennium BC, in particular those associated with the ruler Gudea around 2100 BC, reported improvement works in the city of Lagash involving the use of cornelian, copper, silver, gold, lapis lazuli and valuable timber from Meluhha (Falkenstein 1966).

We may therefore suppose that the intensity of contacts between the



'Bactrian Princess', calcite and soapstone
Musée du Louvre, Département des Antiquités Orientales,
AO 31917
Photograph Réunion des Musées Nationaux

worlds of the Indus, Elam and Mesopotamia, as well as the consequences of the military expeditions by the successors of Sargon, may have directly influenced the history of the groups populating the extensive areas which, to the west and northwest, bordered on the regions identified with the Meluhha of the clay tablet texts. We have also seen that, probably from 2200 BC onwards, a complete network of agglomerations of substantial size and with palace-like buildings grew up in the Murghab delta in Turkmenistan and on either bank of the Oxus. The richness of the grave goods from some of the tombs testifies to the existence of elites whose wealth in such a geographical context is no doubt the result of the very active role that they played in the great network of trading between Mesopotamia, Elam and the Indus valley. The chance discovery of the

gold and silver vessels at Tepe Fullol can now be placed within this general cultural context, around 2200 to 1900 BC.

Our present state of knowledge is inadequate to allow a precise determination of the mutual exchanges between the groups occupying the area from Turkmenistan to the western boundary of the Indus valley. But the data we do have does allow a conclusion that this extended cultural region was so homogeneous – albeit with clear regional variations – that we may speak of a true civilisation, whose existence was completely unsuspected before the chance discovery at Tepe Fullol. There seems to be little room for doubt that this Oxus 'civilisation' had a major impact on the history of the well-known major civilisations of Mesopotamia and the Indus at the end of the third and the start of the second millennium BC. The growing weight of evidence appears to indicate that the exceptional economic prosperity of the cities of the Indus valley from around 2200 BC onwards is significantly connected with the dynamism of trade contacts, in which the groups occupying major areas of the Indo-Iranian border regions and the south of Central Asia played a very important role. It should also be noted that population groups related to the Oxus cultural complex on the southwest border of the Indus valley lived closely together with peoples affiliated to the Indus civilisation immediately before and shortly after 2000 BC. This suggests the development of interactions, which surely must have made their mark on the period.

It is probably also not by coincidence that the Oxus cultural system or 'Oxus civilisation' was just at its zenith at a time when the Mesopotamian world under the Ur III and Isin-Larsa dynasties went through a period of major economic prosperity. Furthermore, the discovery at Mohenjo-daro of a number of round seals of the Dilmun type from the same period, and similar finds at Bahrain and Failaka bearing inscriptions in the script of the Indus civilisation (Kjaerum 1983) as well as at Ur in Mesopotamia (Gadd 1932) go to show how important (together with the land routes) were the connections by sea mentioned on the clay tablets of Sargon of Akkad. It is also significant that when, according to Mesopotamian records, there was a break in trading relations with Meluhha in the eighteenth century BC, the cities of the Indus civilisation obviously were no longer occupied and valuable objects so beautifully exemplified by the gold and silver bowls from Tepe Fullol became very scarce in the graveyards of Central Asia.



The Greek colony at Ai Khanum and Hellenism in Central Asia

Paul Bernard

Member of the Académie des Inscriptions et Belles-Lettres

Former Director of the Délégation Archéologique Française en Afghanistan (DAFA)

With the conquest of Central Asia by Cyrus the Great (reigned 550-530 BC), founder of the ancient Persian Empire of the Achaemenids, Afghanistan and the neighbouring lands had entered the era of the great eastern states. Alexander's conquest of the Persian Empire (334-323 BC) left much of the existing internal structures of this vast ensemble intact but its integration into the newly settled Graeco-Macedonian dominion did however lead to the progressive elimination of Persian culture, which was gradually replaced by Greek culture due to the arrival of colonists. Bactria, the main province of the eastern area of the Empire, in what is to-day northern Afghanistan, exemplifies the phenomenon.

A concise summary of the history of Greek Bactria

In 327 BC, as Alexander departed for India, he was conscious that peace and order in the hard-won region around the Oxus (modern Amu Darya) required consolidation. He therefore left behind to hold the country a greater number of Greeks and Macedonians in military outposts or in colonies than anywhere else in his Empire. He named some of these colonies after himself, such as Alexandria in Aria (Herat), Alexandria in Arachosia (Kandahar), Alexandria of the Caucasus (Begram) and Alexandria Eschate (Khojand in Tajikistan), while other towns, even when reinforced by colonists, were often left with their traditional local names, like Bactra, capital of the province of Bactria, in the middle valley of the Oxus river (to-day Amu Darya).

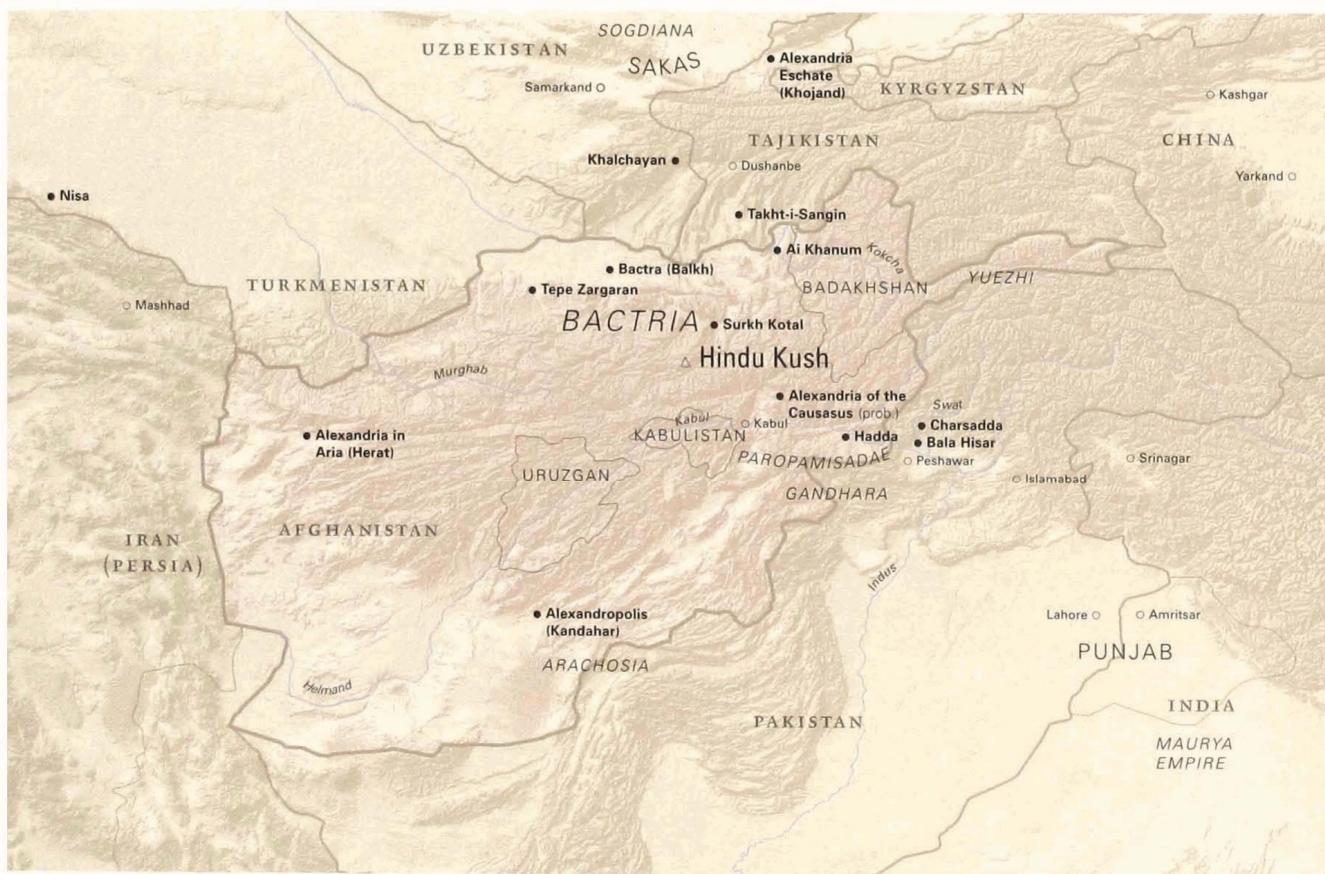
Following the death of Alexander (323 BC), Bactria was absorbed into the Greek Syrian-Mesopotamian Empire, founded by one of Alexander's former commanders, Seleucus (reigned 311-281 BC). He and his son Antiochus I (reigned 281-261 BC) continued a policy of active colonization and so established the foundations of the Graeco-Bactrian state. They founded new cities which became bulwarks of Hellenism, and so

it was for Ai Khanum. This name, of late date, meaning 'Lady Moon' and referring to an Uzbek princess who is supposed to have inhabited a medieval castle on the acropolis, is applied both to the neighbouring Uzbek village and the archaeological site, since the original Greek name is lost to us. In around 250 BC Bactria became an independent state under its governor Diodotus. The Graeco-Bactrian state was initially concentrated along the Oxus valley, but its territory increased enormously from the second century BC onwards with the adoption of a policy of expansion. South of the Hindu Kush, the Greek provinces of Arachosia and Paropamisadae, which had been lost to the Maurya Empire (the first great empire in India, circa 321-185 BC), soon after Alexander's death, were reconquered and Graeco-Bactrian control was even extended as far as the northwest of the Indus valley. In time however it became clear that this policy was having undesired consequences. Weakened by the very magnitude of its expansion and the diversity of the local cultures – whether Iranian or Indian – it encompassed within its borders, compounded by rivalries among the ruling class, the Greek Empire began to fall apart, forming independent principalities, a development which particularly affected the Indo-Greek area. Around 145 BC the Greeks were driven out of Ai Khanum by nomads, who in twenty years would become masters of the entire Oxus valley. The Greek kingdoms south of the Hindu Kush held out for another century, but by the start of the modern era the last remnants in the eastern Punjab, around modern Lahore, of what has been called the fourth great Hellenistic monarchy had vanished, as had the Seleucids of Syria-Mesopotamia (323-64 BC), the Lagids or Ptolemies of Egypt (305-31 BC) and the Attalids of Pergamon (283-133 BC).

The founding of the city

While the attention of the historians of the classical age was always focused on the empires surrounding the Mediterranean, they were also aware of the proverbial riches of Greek Bactria, with its 'thousand cities' and its fertile land, where everything but olives would grow. They recorded the names of certain notable rulers: Diodorus, Euthydemus, Demetrius, Eucratides and Menander, the latter known for his connection with Buddhism. A number of their fine coins had found their way to the collections of museums in Europe and India. However it was a long time

Ai Khanum, Corinthian capital
Photograph Musée Guimet, DAFA fund



Afghanistan (bottom) and wider environs (top)
at the time of Ai Khanum

before the archaeologists discovered the remnants of this Graeco-Bactrian State, which had existed for almost two centuries. In 1924-1925 the Délégation Archéologique Française en Afghanistan (DAFA), headed by Alfred Fouquer, made a first attempt to excavate at Bactra, which was known to have been the main city of the area even before the Greek conquest, but it came to nothing. The failure was aggravated by the erroneous conclusion drawn by Fouquer that the Hellenistic conquerors, while they may have been successful warlords, were neither builders nor people of culture. It seemed to him that if he had found no trace of their civilization it was because it had no material reality. It was only forty years later, in 1964, that the DAFA succeeded in locating and excavating the first monuments bearing witness to the Greek presence in Central Asia, at the site of Ai Khanum. This site, at the easternmost extremity of the Bactrian plain, had first been visited in 1838 by the English explorer J Wood, then again in 1926 by the French archaeologist Jules Barthoux, who was engaged at the time in an investigation of the Buddhist monuments at Hadda. But although both realised it was an important ancient settlement, there was no clue indicating the presence of a Greek city; neither suspected that Hellenistic ruins lay buried here and their testimony went unnoticed. The actual discovery was memorable for its unusual circumstances, where luck connived with sound reasoning. The chance element was a carved stone, shown to the Afghan King Zahir Shah by the occupants of the hamlet of Ai Khanum, close to the border with Soviet Tajikistan, as his hunting party crossed the game-rich marsh areas of the Oxus one day in 1961. But it was not by chance that the King, a real expert in his country's antiquities, reported the puzzling find to Daniel Schlumberger, then director of the DAFA. Schlumberger recognised in the damaged stone a Corinthian capital and concluded that the site where it was found must be a Greek city. On a cold and rainy day in November 1964, French archaeologists, under his direction, arrived for the first time at the majestic site on the banks of the Oxus, under the watchful eyes of the Soviet border guards. They immediately confirmed the nature of the site based on the finds of shards bearing Greek letters. The excavations, begun in 1965, continued until they were interrupted by the Soviet intervention in Afghanistan in 1979.

Evidence gradually accumulated that the city had been founded on the eastern border of Bactria around 300 BC by Seleucus I, in order to control an access road from the northeast leading to a fertile plain, long occupied and developed thanks to a network of irrigation canals. The city came to occupy a triangular location of some 1800 by 1600 metres, delimited by the confluence of two rivers, the Oxus/Amu Darya and the Kokcha, a tributary on the Afghan left bank, and, on the third side, by a 60 metre high tabular acropolis. This natural defensive position was reinforced with a belt of solid city walls, made of sun-dried clay bricks, and to the southeast of the acropolis by a citadel overhanging the Kokcha river. The surrounding countryside was inhabited by native farmers, who worked the land on behalf of the colonists and the local aristocracy. In the city, the Greeks played a dominant but not exclusive role. They formed the ruling class, as witnessed by the Greek and Macedonian names of the high and middle level officials who oversaw the palace treasury. Lesser posts in the financial administration were held by officials of local origin, with such

typically Iranian names as Oxeboakes, Oxybazos, Aryandes and Oumanos.

Most of the public and religious buildings were erected in the lower town, alongside a quarter of residential mansions.

The palace

The city plan was conceived to devote the centre of the lower town to a royal palace, a clear indication that Ai Khanum was itself a royal city. In order to make room for this palace, the main street, which ran from the gate in the northern rampart down to the Kokcha, was moved to the foot of the acropolis. In devising the ground plan of the palace, a type of construction that bore no relationship to their national architectural tradition, the Greeks drew inspiration from the eastern models offered by the royal neo-Babylonian palaces and, even more, by those of the Achaemenid kings. Courtyards and buildings, grouped by blocks corresponding to their residential, administrative or economic function, and forming a compact mass of constructions criss-crossed by numerous corridors, are reminiscent of the palace of the Iranian king Darius I (reigned 522-486 BC) in Susa. A grandiose forecourt (137 x 108 metres), surrounded by four Corinthian porticos of 108 columns, greeted the visitors. Opposite the entrance, the southern portico opened wide at the back to a monumental hall with eighteen Corinthian columns through which one entered various adjoining buildings, including two twin official reception halls embellished with pilasters, a double chancellery section, a large bath-house, two private residences, an inner courtyard with sixty Doric columns and a treasury with its storage rooms set around another courtyard. Apart from the ceremonial rooms, whose walls were decorated with stone or wooden pilasters and reliefs in unfired clay, there was little interior decoration and the earth floors must have been carpeted in accordance with eastern practice. As usual in all Graeco-Bactrian architecture, walls were made of sun-dried clay bricks, sometimes with a base of baked bricks. The roofs were flat, in line with oriental building techniques, but the edges were lined with a typically Greek decoration of terracotta plates known as antefixes, adorned with vegetal motifs (cat. nos. 25-28).

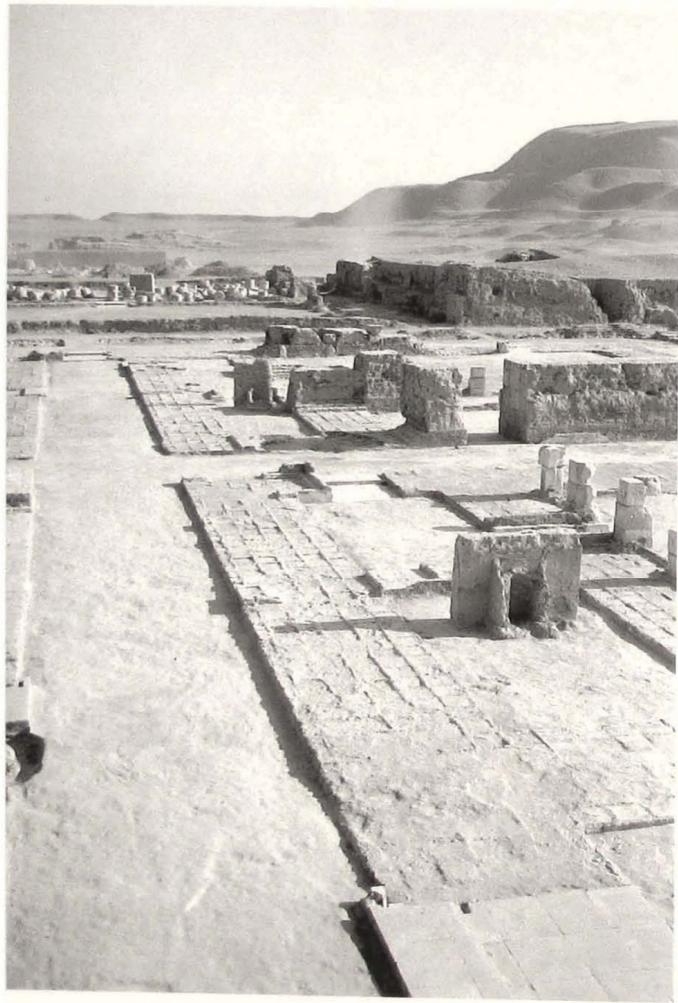
The local natural stone, a soft whitish limestone, was used for some of the sills, and most of the columns and pilasters. All three of the classical orders were present: Ionic columns, with their capitals of a more strictly codified geometry than the other two orders, were something of a rarity, while the Doric was not infrequent, but the Corinthian order, with its more florid decoration of acanthus leaves, was the favourite with the Graeco-Bactrian architects who proposed a lush and exuberant version of it (cat. nos. 4, 24). Circular elements such as the drums of the column shafts and the bases were wrought speedily using an old Greek mechanical turning process which required a less skilled workforce and which the Graeco-Bactrian architects used systematically. Taken all together, this grandiose but severe architecture, despite the somewhat profuse and overblown decoration of stone columns, with an almost obsessive predilection for symmetry and orthogonality, reminds us in many



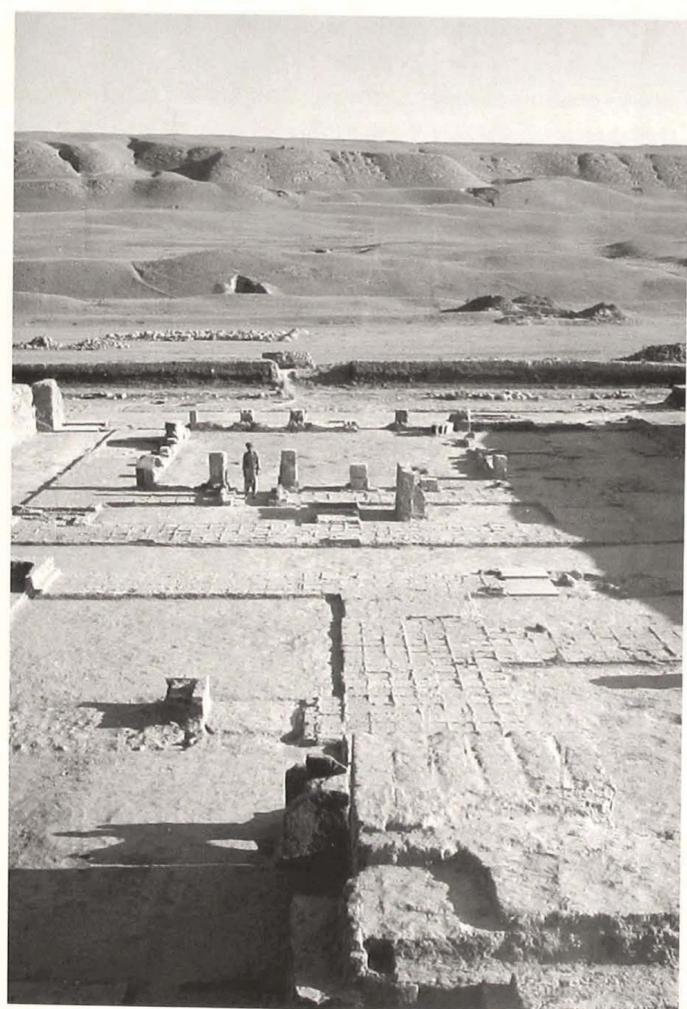
Ai Khanum, discovery of the palace propylaea
Photograph Musée Guimet



Ai Khanum, a door in the palace
Photograph Musée Guimet, DAFA fund



Ai Khanum, ruins of the palace
Photograph Musée Guimet, DAFA fund



respects of the haughty and impassive imperial architecture of the Achaemenid palaces. The Greek touch was provided by the columns and the antefixes. The other buildings at Ai Khanum show the same grand style, designed more to impress and subjugate than to please and seduce.

The gymnasium and the theatre

Like every Greek city of any significance Ai Khanum had its *gymnasium*, devoted to intellectual and physical training, and its theatre, both of them primary institutions for the spread of Hellenism. Their typically Greek architecture is inspired by similar buildings fulfilling the same function in the Greek world. As we learn from an inscription, the gymnasium was placed under the traditional double protection of Hermes and Heracles (cat. no. 32). Apart from other constructions meant for sports in the same ensemble, the building was intended for teaching and occupied a square ground plan of 100 metres to a side, composed of an inner courtyard surrounded by a series of rooms. What set it apart from its Greek models was its enormous dimensions, the recurrent symmetry on each side with a central porch in the axis, and the uninterrupted corridor extending all around the building providing interior circulation and covered ambulatory space necessary in the harsher Central Asiatic climate, functions which in Greek gymnasiums were normally performed by large porticoes opening into the inner courtyard.

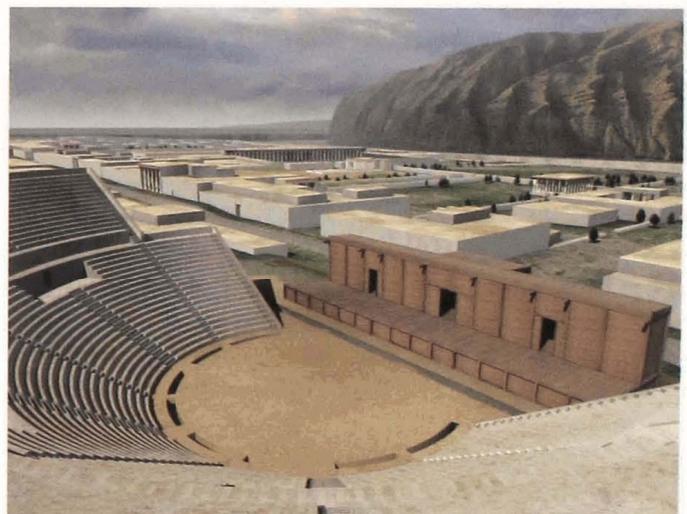
The theatre, the easternmost of its kind in all the Hellenised Orient, further east than the examples at Babylon and Seleucia on the Tigris (near Baghdad), was built against the lower inner slope of the acropolis. It displayed in a semi-circle a wide fan of steeply rising tiers, made of sun-dried bricks, which could seat several thousand spectators. In the absence of an *agora* (central town square), the theatre would serve as a public meeting place for the citizens of the town and the province when they had to deliberate together, but it must have been mainly intended for performances, whether it be of popular spectacles like pantomimes and jugglers, or of the Greek classical repertory made famous by the plays of the three great tragic poets Aeschylus, Sophocles and Euripides, and others, along with comic authors like Menander, which the actors performed wearing a mask, like the one which was sculpted to decorate a water-spout in a fountain next to the Oxus (see cat. no. 34). The great tragic repertoire and the new comedies fostered among the audience a sense of cultural identity and of belonging to the nation of the Hellenes. Spacious honorary loggias halfway up the rows of seats, a feature unknown in Greek theatres of that period, where distinguished guests were honoured simply by being seated in the first row, were the expression of a society in which men of power – the ruler, his court and high officials – did not hesitate to demonstrate publicly their rank. It was an unmistakable sign of the decline of the democratic ideal in Greek colonial Bactria, whereas that ideal continued to be of importance in the cities around the Mediterranean, even when these were incorporated into the Hellenistic kingdoms.



Ai Khanum, the gymnasium
Photograph Musée Guimet, DAFA fund

Domestic architecture

The homes of the leading colonial families were isolated from the common folk in an exclusive residential area at the southern extremity of the city, at the confluence of the two rivers, behind the palace. Some forty patrician residences (65 x 35 metres) lined parallel side streets branching off from the main street. In a traditional Greek house the rooms were set around an inner courtyard which was the hub of domestic life, but at



Ai Khanum, the theatre,
3D reconstruction
Source: NHK, TAISEI, O. Ishizawa and G. Lecuyot

Ai Khanum the central space was reserved for the main reception and living room, while the other rooms and service areas were disposed around it horseshoe fashion along a corridor which provided access to the central unit but which at the same time isolated it from them. Removed from its central position and pushed to the northeast side, the courtyard became a forecourt with a privileged access from the reception room through a porch with two columns protected from the prevailing winds blowing up the Oxus valley. The forecourt seems to have been primarily intended for the head of the house. Outside the northern rampart a mansion of monumental dimensions (107 x 72 metres) displays a similar ground plan which, with a few alterations, occurs again within the palace in its two residential sections. This type of design did not take shape all at once in the minds of the Graeco-Bactrian architects: before it attained its final form in the second century it went through formative stages which could be observed in the deepest layers of the house excavated in the residential quarter near the Kokcha river. One thing seems sure: this quite original plan of an aristocratic mansion was elaborated in Central Asia in Graeco-oriental milieus as can be inferred from the recently excavated 'Red Building' at Nisa (Turkmenistan), the first capital of the Parthian empire, which offers a striking resemblance to the Graeco-Bactrian residences.

This ground plan, which made the reception room the epicentre of the living area and reserved the courtyard for the preferential if not exclusive use of the lord of the house, suggests a stricter hierarchy in family relationships, with an increased ascendancy of the master of the family, an arrangement characteristic of colonial communities. Although this type of house is very different from what is found around the Mediterranean, there was nevertheless one facility that was entirely in keeping with the Greek lifestyle: the bathroom. These bathing facilities, even the best-finished, were relatively simple, as bathing was a question of pouring water, brought in buckets, over oneself and not of bathing in a tub.

Religion and religious architecture

The greatest degree of innovation was found in religious architecture. The typical rectangular plan of Greek temples built in stone, with their columns, pediments and exterior sculptural decoration, was abandoned. The city's principal temple, which stood on the main street, was a compact building of sun-dried masonry on a 20 square metre ground plan, set on a high three-stepped podium (1.5 metres). A wide vestibule led directly to the smaller cult room containing the statue of the god and flanked with two narrow sacristies on either side. The ground plan, the raised podium, the exterior decoration of indented niches, the flat roof, all point towards religious architecture of the East, from Mesopotamia to Central Asia. A similar building, even more monumental, with three juxtaposed cult rooms, outside the northern rampart, close to the entrance gate of the city, confirms that this was the standard plan for Graeco-Bactrian temples.

If these buildings could barely be termed Greek, the same cannot be said of the deities who were worshipped in them, and who were closely linked to the Greek pantheon, as can be inferred from the coinage minted by the Graeco-Bactrian rulers. We also know that Hermes and Heracles were the patrons of the gymnasium (cat. no. 32), and that Cybele (cat. no. 23) and Hestia were honoured. The sandal on the one marble foot that survived

of the cult statue of the main temple is decorated with the images of winged lightning, indicating that the deity honoured there was Zeus, even if the unmistakeably eastern character of the building suggests a syncretic deity of mixed Graeco-oriental parentage, probably a Zeus-Mithra, as he appears with a Persian cap and a halo of rays on Indo-Greek coins. In spite of appearances, a beautiful disc of gilded silver representing Cybele, the goddess of nature, cannot be taken as evidence of a specifically eastern cult, for although of Anatolian origin, the goddess had been adopted by the Greeks long before Alexander's conquest of Central Asia and the founding of the city. If the pervasive eastern flavour of the sacred architecture induces us to assume some degree of religious symbiosis between the colonists and the native population, the exact extent of it remains a matter for speculation. On the other hand, no doubt subsists about the Iranian character of the monumental stepped platform built of sun-baked bricks which stood in the middle of an open air-shrine on the southwest extremity of the acropolis, where the priest would officiate, turning his face to the rising sun. This platform is indisputably reminiscent of the religious monuments of the Persians who, as recorded by Greek historians, worshipped their gods without representing them in human form, on elevated sites in the open air.

Honouring the dead

The inhabitants of Ai Khanum conformed to the traditions of their ancestors when it came to their treatment of the dead. These were normally buried outside the city, where the richest families possessed multi-chambered mausoleums which half-protruded from the ground as solid cubes. The vaulted burial chambers were periodically emptied and the bones assembled in jars upon which the names of the deceased were inscribed in ink: on those which we recovered we could read in Greek 'he and she, the little ones' (either children who had died shortly after birth and had not yet been named, or young slaves), 'Isidora', 'Lysanias' (a typically Macedonian name) and 'Cosmas'. But it was also a Greek practice to bury important personages and city benefactors within the city, in highly visible locations, to honour their memory and propose their accomplishments as examples. To this custom we owe the discovery of what must have been, in spite of its rather modest aspect, an illustrious monument. In the heart of the lower town, close to the entrance of the future palace, stood on a podium a simple funerary chapel, its porch flanked by two wooden columns. Buried underneath lay the sarcophagus of one Kineas who had been mandated (probably by Scleucus I) to found the city. His name is known to us thanks to a Greek inscription discovered in the porch, which records the visit of a certain Clearchus who had travelled from Greece at the start of the third century BC, and who is probably no less than the philosopher Clearchus of Soli, a pupil of Aristotle. Anxious that the inhabitants of the recently founded city should keep to their Hellenic traditions, he had a copy of some 150 maxims of wisdom, ascribed to the famed Seven Sages of Greece who had dedicated them to the god Apollo in his oracular sanctuary of Delphi, engraved on a stele over the grave of Kineas (cat. nos. 29-30). Presented in the form of aphorisms, these sayings defined the ideal virtues of the Greek man as a citizen and in his family life. Formulated by the highest moral authorities of ancient Greece, and exhibited to be read in its entirety in the most sacred spot of the city, this pledge to the moral and

civic values of Hellenism is an illuminating testimony to the will of the colonists to preserve intact their ancestral inheritance. A second mausoleum in the city, of later date, lacks the emotional charge of the Kineas monument, no doubt in part because of its anonymous nature. Nevertheless the building, planned as a small temple (30 x 20 metres), with an underground stone burial chamber, had a monumental character and must have radiated an air of dignity. It stood on an elevated terrace, surrounded by a 6 metre high stone colonnade with Ionic capitals, an order that, as we have noted, was quite uncommon at Ai Khanum, and whose choice reflects the deliberate intention of making this a special monument.



The funerary epigram of Sophy whole, found in Kandahar
Photograph Paul Bernard



Funerary monument of Kineas,
Base of the stele with the
Delphic maxims of wisdom (cat. no. 29)
Photograph Musée Guimet, DAFA fund

The Greek language as the cement for national identity

Their preservation of the Greek language is a further indication of the colonists' attachment to their national culture. They continued to speak and write Greek in an uncontaminated form right to the end, as evidenced by the inscriptions found during the excavations. The various types and styles of script (cursive for handwritten documents on papyri, parchments, vases; capitals for inscriptions on stone) reflect a linguistic development similar to that found in documents from the Mediterranean. Numerous handwritten documents were found in the palace treasury: these were short texts, written in ink on ceramic jars and other vessels, reporting the date of storage and the quantity stored as well as the names of the officials involved. The contents included silver coins, representing the cash reserve of the palace, incense, wine and oil. The officials involved in the management and the system of control used are identical to those employed in treasuries elsewhere in the Greek world (cat. nos. 10-11). One of the inscriptions on a bowl used as the lid of a jar containing olive oil is of special significance since it is dated to the year 24, which certainly refers to the reign of King Eucratides, and thus allows us to date to 145 BC the destruction of the treasury. In that year the palace was burned down by nomads and the Greek city came to an end (cat. no. 11). Three receipts for payments written on parchment, chance finds from other places in Bactria, are indistinguishable from those produced by the hand of Ptolemaic or Seleucid clerks.

Inscriptions on stone are rare, but fortunately the few that were discovered are of great interest. The dedication of the gymnasium to Hermes and Heracles has already been mentioned, as well as the now famous inscription by Clearchus with the Delphic maxims. Also significant are a funerary epigram from the city necropolis and two other inscriptions in verse which were found fortuitously outside Ai Khanum. All of them demonstrate the local writers' command of Greek poetic language and meter. In the one originating probably from an area not too far from Ai Khanum, the king's official Heliodotus dedicates an altar to Hestia 'the most venerable of the goddesses', protector of the holy fire of the family and of the state, and asks her protection for 'the greatest of all kings' Euthydemus (circa 230-200 BC) and his son Demetrius (circa 200-180 BC), 'the splendid victor', who was destined, in the following years, to start the conquest of northwest India. The exalted, triumphant tone of these verses which ring like a Pindaric ode reflects the euphoria which swept Greek Bactria after the successful resistance of Euthydemus, besieged for two years (208-206 BC) in Bactra, his capital, by the Seleucid ruler Antiochus III (223-187 BC). The latter was eventually forced to officially acknowledge Euthydemus as King of Bactria and to treat him as an equal. The other inscription, probably from Kandahar, is a long funerary poem written by the deceased himself during his life and cryptically signed by means of an acrostic. His name, Sophy whole, sounds quite Hellenic, but is in fact the transcription in Greek of a good Indian name. The poem tells us that this Sophy whole, the scion of a wealthy family, had been in his youth duly initiated into the art of Apollo and of the Muses, and had fully assimilated Greek culture. While still young he had been left a destitute victim of a disaster which befell his family. Borrowing some money, he had decided to emigrate and to try his luck in trade abroad. He returned many years later immensely rich and now feted. He restored his family's long-neglected house and rebuilt the ancestral mausoleum in which he had this stele inscribed with his epigram to

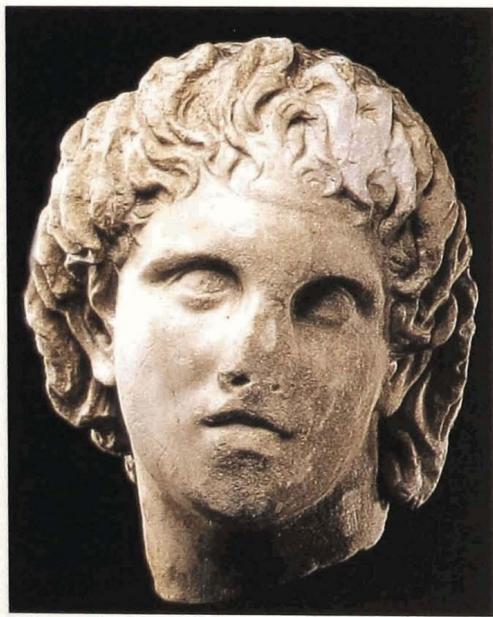
celebrate his hard-earned successes and proposes them as a model for his heirs. This exceptional document demonstrates how vigorously Hellenism had taken root in the province of Arachosia, south of the Hindu Kush around Kandahar, since Alexander the Great had left there, in 330 BC, some thousands of soldiers. After his death the colony had gained in strength under the supervision of a remarkable governor, Sibyrtius, who had played host to the historian Megasthenes, the future author of the best book ever written by a Greek about India. Hellenism had continued to flourish under the benign rule of the Indian Maurya dynasty in the third century BC, to which Arachosia had been lost at the end of the fourth century BC, until the conquests by Demetrius, Euthydemus's son, at the beginning of the second century, restored, from Bactra to Kandahar, the unity of the Greek state in Central Asia. Thanks to the example provided by Sophyros we can better understand how Plutarch could write, without shocking his readers, although not without exaggeration, that the people of the East, or, to be more accurate, the more or less Hellenised local aristocracy, were still in his time (middle of the second century AD), several centuries after Alexander's conquest, reading Homer and their children reciting the tragedies of Sophocles and Euripides. It was in gymnasiums and theatres like those at Ai Khanum that local elites could absorb the best that Greek culture had to offer. Like Sibyrtius before, the Graeco-Bactrian rulers were far from being uncivilised condottieres. Following the examples of the Hellenistic rulers, patrons of arts and letters, they had stocked their palace at Ai Khanum with a collection of literary manuscripts, probably brought from the West. We have come to know this through a surprising find in one of the rooms of the treasury which served as a library. The parchments and papyri on which the texts had been written had disintegrated, leaving behind only a thin layer of white powder. But the ink of the

letters had been imprinted by pressure on the fine dust from the decayed sun-dried bricks of the walls. It was therefore possible to read, on clods of earth, some pages of a lost philosophical treaty by Aristotle, where the author discussed Plato's theory of Ideas, and next to them, some fragments of a text in verse.

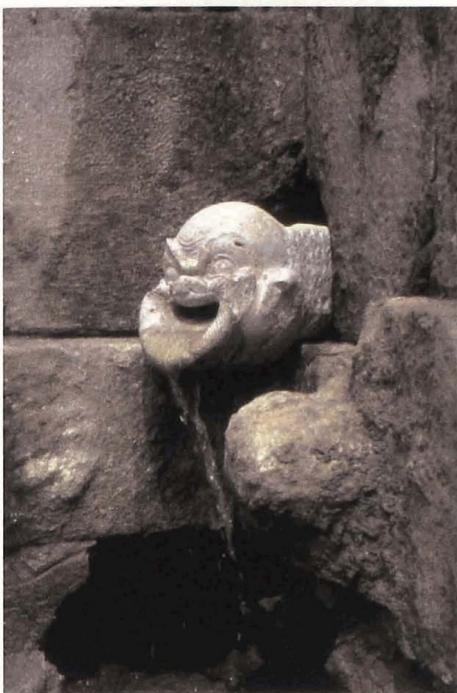
Figurative arts and traditionalism

The traditionalism pervading the figurative arts in Bactria, which seemed to have fallen under the spell of a kind of late Classicism, was the result of several causes: the great distance which separated Bactria from the major Mediterranean centres where a powerful artistic renewal was taking place, the political break around 250 BC from the Seleucid empire which, through royal patronage and the dynamism of its cities, was one of the main agents of this cultural revolution, and lastly the barrier which was progressively interposed, even if it was never completely sealed, between Bactria and the Mediterranean world, by the emergence and the expansion of the Parthian kingdom. While, in the West, mosaics could be found in rooms of different functions, mainly in the dining rooms, they were limited in Bactria to the dressing rooms of the bath-sections. They were made using an already obsolete technique of river pebbles laid in cement. The traditional geometrical and vegetal motifs, the sea-creatures, reduced to opaque silhouettes by the widely spaced juxtaposition of fairly big pebbles of only two or three colours, had little in common with the creations of the Mediterranean mosaic workers of the time who, with minute, multicoloured stone inlays, composed illusionist tableaux that could pass for real paintings in stone.

Graeco-Bactrian sculptors, inspired by the creations of their Seleucid colleagues, brought to Central Asia, for statues of large dimensions, the Greek technique of acroliths, where only the undraped parts (faces, hands and feet) were made in stone; the remainder consisting of a timber framework, covered in fabric or modelled in clay or stucco. This technique was used for the larger than life cult statue in the main temple at Ai Khanum, the work of a true master, of which only one marble foot in a sandal together with some fragments of fingers survive. Apart from the cult statue, stone – a soft limestone, the same as used by the architects – was employed only for statues of small to medium size, in a conservative style but carved with great skill. A good example is the statue of a nude young man, crowned with a leaf wreath (symbolising victory in a competition?). The anatomical rendering is impeccable, as is also the case with the statuette of another naked youth with a cloak wrapped over his left arm, depicted in relief on a funerary stele found in the necropolis (cat. no. 35), another typically Greek genre. The most representative piece is a Hermes pillar, also characteristic of Greek sculpture, so called because such pillars were originally crowned with a Hermes head. At Ai Khanum the pillar bears the bust of an old man in a cloak, probably the master of the gymnasium where the statue was discovered, his lively and sensitive face contrasting with the heavy, rather clumsy drapery (cat. no. 32). In a more modest class but with comparable Greek workmanship and treated with gusto is the grotesque grinning mask, worn in Greek comedy by the slave-cook, which served as a water spout in a fountain overlooking the Oxus, near the gymnasium (cat. no. 34). Bronze statues, more likely to disappear than their stone counterparts, have left only minimal fragments, enough however to attest to their existence.



Portrait of Alexander the Great, marble, 3rd century BC
Pella, Archaeological Museum
Photograph Musée Guimet



Ai Khanum, the Fountain of the Oxus
Photograph Paul Bernard



Marsyas playing the double flute,
2nd century BC
Takht-i-Sangin, temple of the Oxus
Photograph Musée Guimet

The Graeco-Bactrian sculptors did at least contribute one major innovation to their art by introducing and perfecting a technique used only to a limited extent in the Greek world and which was to have an immense and lasting success in Central Asia: statues modelled in unfired clay or stucco on wooden frames and sticks of lead (for the hands).

The minor art-forms, more easily influenced by the native arts, were more open to oriental traditions, as can be seen from some figurines of naked women (or goddesses), plump and in stiff attitudes, made in bone, or moulded in terracotta, overburdened by heavy draperies of vaguely Hellenistic style. Only a few objects were found demonstrating an attempt to fuse Greek and eastern traditions. The most remarkable is a large disc of gilded silver showing Cybele, the goddess of nature, passing through a mountain landscape on a carriage drawn by lions, and driven by a winged Victory, with two long robed priests participating in the scene. Features borrowed from the Hellenic tradition (the type of Cybele, the allegorical representation of Victory as a winged Nike and of the sun as the haloed bust of Helios, the feminine draperies, the lions parading) are juxtaposed to conventions from oriental art (composition without perspective, juxtaposition of motifs without any overlapping, absence of transition between contrasting profile and frontal views of the various parts of the bodies) without really being harmonised.

Dynamic craft workshops

Graeco-Bactrian craftsmanship was a particularly dynamic area of activity, with Greek techniques used to meet the requirements of day to day living. Ivory was imported in quantity from neighbouring India, providing the raw material for a bustling branch of production. This was particularly the case with the manufacture of chairs and beds, whose bell-and-disk profiled feet are derived from Greek prototypes. Heavy domestic hopper grindstones activated by a horizontal handle and bronze ink pots are imitations of characteristic western models, not to mention the so-called *strigils* with which athletes after competing used to scrape their bodies clean of oil and sweat before bathing. Time was measured by typically Greek hemispherical sundials (cat. no. 31). However another very peculiar specimen in the form of a parallelepiped, with a transverse cylindrical opening with the hour lines engraved inside, represents a unique type of equatorial sundial (cat. no. 33), probably a pedagogical instrument to teach astronomy in the gymnasium. An armoury produced all kinds of military equipment, stored in a large arsenal on the main street, which unfortunately was hardly explored during our campaign of 1978, the last before the Soviet military intervention of 1979. One remarkable discovery made there consisted of substantial remnants of iron armour used by the *cataphractarii*, famed in antiquity, who were horsemen covered in mail from head to toe as well as their horses. This heavily clad cavalry was mainly used by the Parthians, but it had also been adopted by the Hellenistic armies. This is confirmed by the finds

from Ai Khanum, which offer the best preserved and most ancient examples of this type of armour.

The bulk of the earthenware vessels were in specifically local forms, such as cylindro-conical beakers. Nevertheless there was also a large variety of Greek forms, for example the so-called fish-plates, drinking bowls and (among the latter) the so-called Megarian bowls decorated with vegetal motifs in relief, jugs and amphoras. Frequent use was made of a black or red slip, reminiscent of Hellenistic monochrome vessels, often in combination with impressed palmette ornamentation. Local workshops had made a speciality of decorative stone vessels carved from a blue-grey schist with various engraved motifs and incrustation of multicoloured ceramic inlays forming geometric designs: specimens include plates and hemispherical lidded boxes with internal radiating compartments, which are the direct precursors of Buddhist reliquaries (cat. nos. 18-20).

Imported luxury items

Imports are represented by a fine collection of semi-precious stones, originating primarily in India, and by some pieces of exceptional interest. Half a dozen plaster casts, made from relief decorations on vessels in precious metal from the western Hellenistic world, and depicting mythological and epic scenes, are among the earliest examples of these types of moulded copies, used as models by local goldsmiths and silversmiths. Numerous similar finds from Egypt to Bagram (cat. nos. 183-190), and now Ai Khanum in Afghanistan, testify to the wide diffusion of these moulds and casts and to the role they played in the dissemination of classical iconography. Another unique piece is without parallel even in its country of origin, India (cat. no. 9). It is a large disc made up of an assemblage of small plaquettes of a kind of mother of pearl, with a decoration of tiny inlays of coloured glass delineated by gold threads, forming a complex composition which might depict the famous Indian myth, the love story of king Dushyanta and the fair nymph Shakuntala, who gave birth to Bharata, the eponymous ancestor of the Indian nation. Not only does this prestigious object furnish us with precious information about the earliest figurative art of eponymous India, but it also represents a piece of the history of Ai Khanum. Discovered in the layer containing the burned remnants of the royal treasury, where it had been stored shortly before the palace was pillaged and destroyed by nomads



Ai Khanum, the palace
Photograph Musée Guimet, DAFA fund

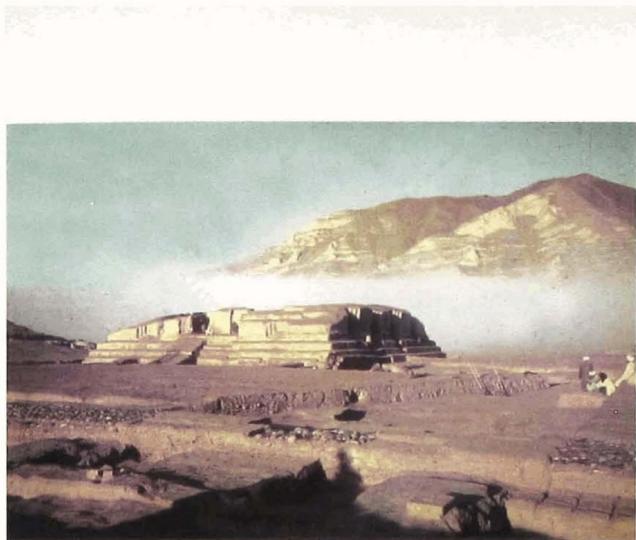


Eucratides I (170-145 BC),
gold medallion of twenty staters
Cabinet des Médailles, Bibliothèque Nationale de France
Photograph Musée Guimet

around 145 BC, it may very well have formed part of the booty collected by the last great king who reigned in eastern Bactria, around Ai Khanum, Eucratides, during one of his campaigns in India. It is a strong argument in support of the idea that the city of Eucratidia in Bactria, mentioned by the geographer Ptolemy (VI, 11, 8), was Ai Khanum, refounded as his capital city and given his own name, and to which he would repair after his Indian expeditions.

The end of the Greek city

The end of the Greek city came suddenly around 145 BC. Nomads from the northeast, perhaps Sakas on their way to plunder Bactria, set fire to the palace of Ai Khanum, the seat and symbol of authority, and robbed the treasury. It seems the Greek population had fled before the attack of the invaders. The local people, until then living outside the city, settled down en masse inside the ramparts and re-occupied the buildings abandoned by the Greeks, making no distinction between public and private areas, and systematically plundered all the goods and possessions left behind by the former owners. The burned-out palace was torn down to the ground everywhere where building materials could be recuperated (stone, metal, and baked bricks). Some time later followed another, equally unexpected attack by nomads. This time they were Yuezhi, migrating from Chinese Turkestan, the future founders of the Kushan Empire which extended from the Oxus to the Ganges, who now brought the brief post-Greek reoccupation to an end. They marked their passage by setting fire to the temple with indented niches, which the post-Greek 'squatters' had converted into a storage space for every kind of rare and valuable item. By around 140 BC the city of Ai Khanum was a wasteland of ruins, gradually disappearing under its own rubble. Only the citadel on the acropolis continued to be sparsely occupied, from time to time, up to the Timurid period (fifteenth/sixteenth century).



Ai Khanum, the temple with indented niches
Photograph Paul Bernard



Ai Khanum, the looted lower town
Photograph Paul Bernard

The Greek legacy

The end of Greek power in Bactria (around 130 BC) and the Punjab (around the beginning of our era) did not mean the immediate and complete disappearance of Hellenism from Central Asia. The civilisations which succeeded the Greeks continued to draw on their legacy for a long period, right up to the Islamic conquest. Examples include the use of the Greek alphabet by the Kushan state to write the Bactrian language which became the official tongue from the beginning of the second century AD,

the regular functioning of a royal mint, elements of architectural decoration like the Corinthian capital and the ubiquitous acanthus leaf, with its endless variations, the ground plan of some buildings and fashioning of statues using unfired clay and plaster. Generally speaking, in spite of ever-recurring tendencies towards abstract or decorative conventions, artists continued to be inspired by the Hellenistic conception of art as the illusionist representation of physical reality, but without crude naturalism. Greek art had made man the centre of its vision: the lesson was never entirely lost.



Tillya-tepe, the 'Hill of Gold'

A nomad necropolis

Véronique Schiltz

Scientific researcher, Laboratoire d'archéologie, ENS-Ulm-CNRS, Paris

Corresponding member of the Académie des Inscriptions et Belles-Lettres

*For the man who rides across the wilderness,
there comes a rising longing within him for a city.*

Italo Calvino

It is November 1978 in Kabul. An international congress on the Kushan dynasty for historians and archaeologists is being held here. The Russian Viktor Sarianidi, who has just arrived from the Tillya-tepe excavations, a Bronze Age mound, meets up with a French colleague, Paul Bernard, who has been working on the excavation of the Hellenistic city of Ai Khanum. The Russian archaeologist takes out of his pocket a golden dress clasp which has been carefully wrapped in a piece of newspaper. He shows it to his French colleague, eager to have his opinion about it. In uncovering the brick walls of the monumental building which he had been exploring, his workers discovered gold. It was a tomb. His Russian-Afghan team immediately had it subjected to a detailed study. The gold object is the 'man with dolphin' (cat. no. 36). The tomb is grave I. In three short months another five graves would be opened.

After contemplating together for a long moment the little gold plaque, the two scholars go their separate ways. The Russian returned to his excavations at Tillya-tepe, which he brought to a satisfactory conclusion despite the vicissitudes of the Afghan winter. In February 1979 he left a country which was now descending into chaos. The Frenchman returned to Paris, and then had to wait for a quarter of a century before he was able to visit the devastated site of Ai Khanum.

At the time of their encounter in 1978 they were still unaware that the necropolis where Viktor Sarianidi's work was interrupted – a site whose discovery could be seen as the crowning glory of a life entirely devoted to archaeology – was actually one of the missing pieces in the puzzle which had been sought so assiduously, the missing link between the end of Ai Khanum, the Greek city on the Oxus, laid waste by nomads, and the foundation by nomads of the great Kushan Empire.

For if it is still to be demonstrated that the occupants of Tillya-tepe were the famed Yuezhi nomads, originating in the area bordering China, ancestors of the Kushana and founders of their empire, nevertheless this

site threw a sharp light on the little-known period between the fall of the Graeco-Bactrian rulers and the emergence of a power that would dominate this part of the world for four centuries. What Tillya-tepe shows, both historically and as an element of this exhibition, is that the nomads occupy an important position in the Afghan region. Their significance went long unnoticed: after all, what trace do nomads 'without walls and houses' (Herodotus, IV, 46) leave behind them, apart from their graves? If they appeared in the accounts of Bactria at all, their role was limited to a series of acts of destruction.

As so often happens, it wasn't exactly this kind of discovery that Viktor Sarianidi expected to make in the winter of 1978-79 on the hill of Tillya-



Head of the female from grave VI, showing crown (cat. no. 134), hair ornament (cat. no. 142) and breastband, in situ
Source: V Sarianidi 1983

tepe, or more precisely, it wasn't only that. The objective of the Russian-Afghan archaeological collaboration, established in 1969, was to carry out, on the Afghan left bank of the river Oxus, new archaeological investigations, in addition to the excavations in Turkmenistan and the south of Uzbekistan, both then part of the Soviet Union, in order to gain a better understanding of the urban civilisation of the former Bactria during the Bronze Age (the second millennium BC).

The French were the first to undertake excavations in Afghanistan, but the Russians also had a longstanding interest in Afghanistan and its archaeology. As early as 1850 Boris Dorn had conducted linguistic investigations. Vasily Grigoriev was active from 1867 onwards in Kabulistan in the south and Kafiristan in the east, while the enthusiasm of Vasily Barthold initiated the archaeological investigations in Bactria (Gorshenina – Rapin 2001).

The discovery

The Afghan-Russian team had decided to investigate a site at the oasis of Sheberghan, around a hundred kilometres to the west of Bactra (Balkh). From this island of green in a barren plain rose the ruins of Emshi-tepe, an ancient walled city with a citadel and palace. The excavations revealed that the city, probably founded in Graeco-Bactrian times, had flourished by the time of the Kushan dynasty.

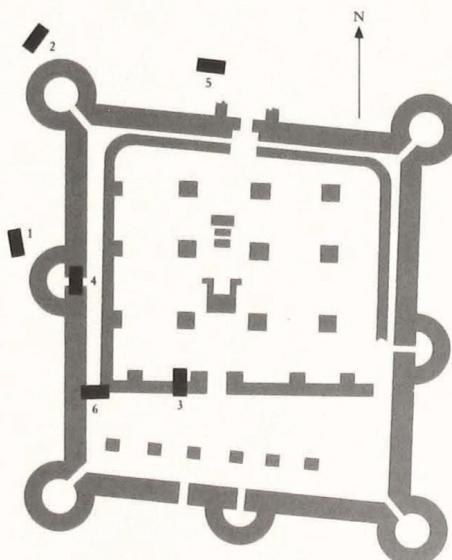
Some five hundred metres beyond the city walls lay a mound three to four metres high with a diameter of around one hundred metres. Scraping away the upper layers, the archaeologists discovered pottery characteristic of the end of the second millennium BC, comparable with fragments found in southern Turkmenistan. They decided to investigate the mound further. They soon encountered the remnants of a monumental work of mud-brick construction, a terrace and columned hall, surrounded by a thick wall. Among Sarianidi's great achievements is his successful completion and publication of the excavations of this complex from the end of the Bronze Age and the beginning of the Iron Age, which he interpreted as a temple (Sarianidi 1989). Sarianidi might have been simply tempted to leave everything else aside in order to dig up only the gold.

The excavations showed that there had been a settlement for a brief time upon the ruins of the temple. At the start of the present era, the mound was no more than a heap of soil and clay. While carting away the large quantity of earth, one of the diggers found gold. The name of the site ought perhaps to have alerted the archaeologists from the start: 'Tillya-tepe' as the Russians called it (the name has now been generally adopted) was known as Tilla Tepa in the local Uzbek language, meaning 'Golden Hill'.

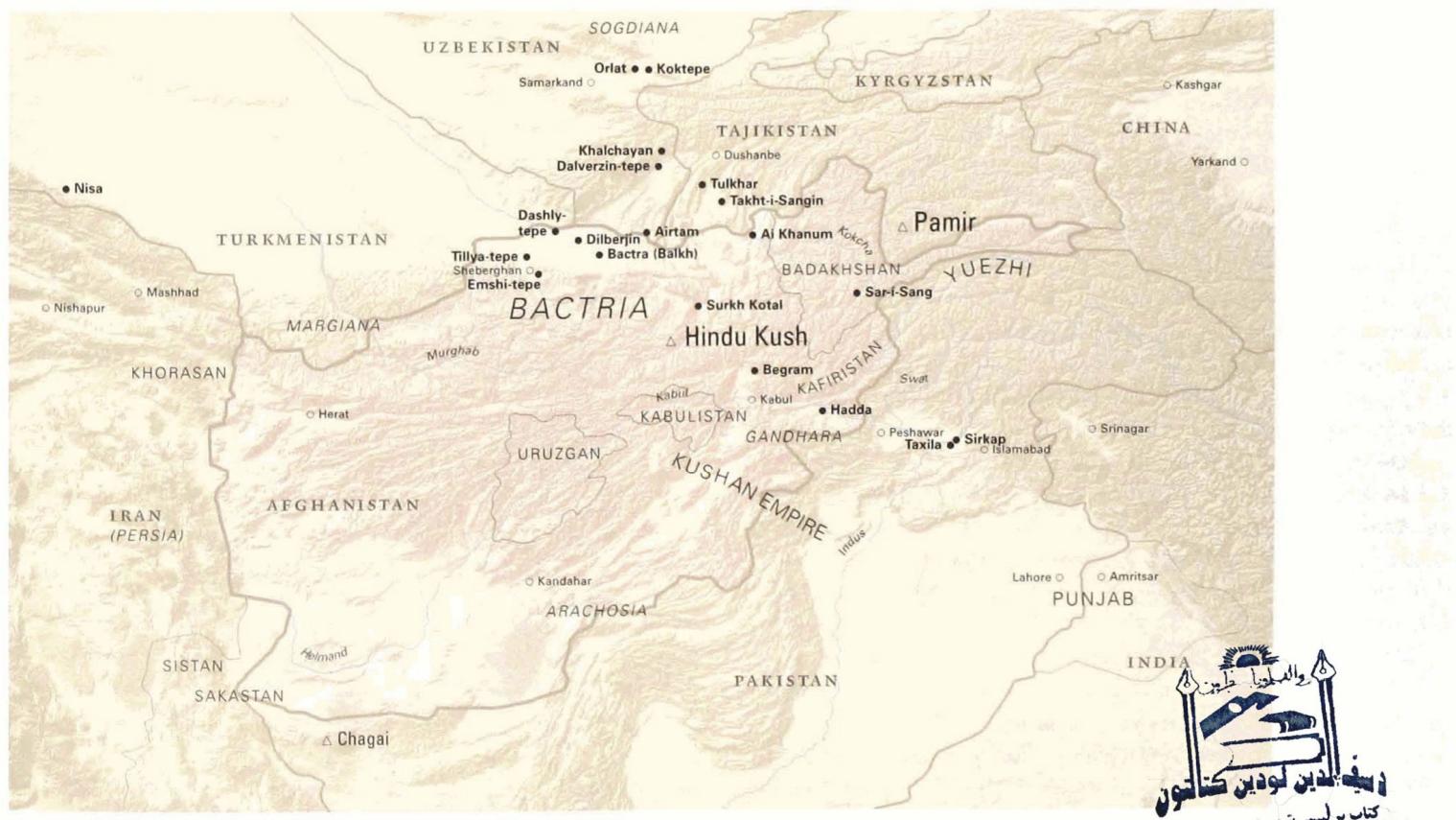
Six graves were found, set partly into the side of the mound, partly into the thick walls of crumbling brick. They were set close together, on the side facing the city of Emshi-tepe. With the assistance of Zemaryalai Tarzi, the Afghan head of the archaeological mission, and other Afghan colleagues, Sarianidi succeeded in carefully exposing all six graves. About twenty thousand objects were revealed in the process, all to be cleaned, recorded and finally packed up for transfer to the National Museum in Kabul. Just days before the excavations were to conclude, a seventh grave was found, but time ran out with the onset of winter, and the grave was carefully covered over with the intention of investigating it further the following year. But in December 1979 the Soviet army invaded Afghani-

stan and war broke out. Nevertheless, Sarianidi returned to Kabul in 1982, together with two photographers. A magnificent book of photographs entitled *Zoloto Baktrii* (Bactrian Gold) was published in several languages in Leningrad in 1985. With superb photographs by Vladimir Terebenin and Leonid Bogdanov, this book was for many years the only way in which either art-lovers or specialists were able to examine these objects.

Enormous praise is due to Sarianidi for his generosity in so quickly making his findings internationally known. As a supplement to the countless articles which immediately appeared in the international press, he wrote a further two lively and charming books, but also crammed with precious information (Sarianidi 1983 and 1984). In 1989, while continuing to work on important Bronze Age sites in Margiana, he published what still counts as the only scientific publication on the excavations at 'The temple and necropolis of Tillya-tepe' (Sarianidi 1989). In this work he wisely called on the knowledge of colleagues like Gennady Koshelenko to supplement his own expertise, which until then had focused more on proto-history. This publication formed a supplement to the book of photographs mentioned above, amending and clarifying the text in various areas. We discover that it was not only gold, silver and other beautiful objects that were found at Tillya-tepe (providing the subject matter for superb full-page photographs), but also anthropological material such as skulls and other bones, organic residues, imprints of textiles, fragments of two bows, the remains of a folding throne, and many other items of great value to those interested in things other than precious jewels. And while we may not nowadays share all the author's conclusions, basing our knowledge on more recent research or new hypotheses, nevertheless we continue to rely to a great extent on this publication, starting naturally enough with the structure of the tombs and their layout.



Map of Tillya-tepe:
remains of the fortified temple and
the position of the six graves
Source: V Sarianidi 1985



Afghanistan (bottom) and wider environs (top) insofar as linked to Tillya-tepe

The structure and position of the graves

Leaving aside the objects lying concealed within them, it is first and foremost the structure of the graves, laid out as they were within a mound, which points to the close involvement of the dead with the nomadic tradition. However, what we have at Tillya-tepe is far from a princely *kurgan* (tumulus). There is no funeral pit with a lateral burial niche and no wooden burial chamber at all. Instead we have simple trenches covered with timber planking, scattered with earth, with a lidless, cloth-wound burial coffin lying directly on the floor or slightly elevated. Faced with this level of simplicity, so different from graves found elsewhere in the world of nomads, Sarianidi formulated the hypothesis that these were clandestine burials, hastily conducted by night and without the knowledge of the occupants of the neighbouring city of Emshi-tepe, perhaps out of fear of grave robbers. But it is rather difficult to imagine that the digging of these graves and the funeral ceremonies could have taken place unnoticed by the inhabitants, living as they did a couple of hundred meters away. Furthermore there are cases enough of tribes deviating from their usual nomadic circuits, perhaps because they were in the midst of a migration, or indeed because they were moving to a more settled existence. In such circumstances they often turned to existing burial mounds or even natural hillocks. For the nomadic tradition required that the dead be buried within some kind of mound.

In Kossika for instance, between the Volga and the Don, at a time when nomads, probably the Alani, were moving to the west, a similar type of grave, also containing a dagger with a four-lobed sheath as at Tillya-tepe, was laid out on top of a natural mound: it appears that time or means were lacking for the building of a 'proper' *kurgan* mound.

It seems therefore that these were nomads whose normal rhythm of life had been disturbed. They no longer had access to the sites of their ancestral burial grounds, while the tributary relationships and alliances required for the moving of tons of earth for the building of a mound had probably also dwindled away. Nevertheless they found it important that their dead should be interred in the manner which their forebears had always employed. For we know that however easy it is to adapt ourselves to new customs of life, that whatever concerns death is always done the old way. Even to the present day in Kazakhstan one may encounter huge nomad tents of white felt (*yurts*) placed between two buildings, put there to honour the dead and as a substitute for a traditional funeral.

The people of Tillya-tepe dealt with images and symbolic language in the same way as with the layout of graves: they took the local traditions into account, but modified them to suit their own preferences.

The briefest glance at the plan of the necropolis makes it obvious: the position of the graves does not appear to be merely coincidental, or dictated by the terrain. Not only is it clear that the five females surround the male, the male is also at the top of the mound, flanked by the most richly ornamented females, in graves VI and III. They were for example the only ones to have the large, symmetrical paired clasps (cat. nos. 79 and 136), quite similar to the fourteen examples from the famous Siberian collection of Peter the Great, displayed in the Hermitage in St Petersburg. In addition to that, these three primary persons were interred within the ancient walls, while the other women (graves I, II and V) lay at the foot of the mound. Moreover, the girl in grave V, so modestly adorned that the diggers nicknamed her 'Cinderella', seemed to lie quite aside.

Is it possible for us to conclude on these grounds that these interment graves were laid out according to a clear plan, all at once? And what are the criteria for dating the graves?

Coins and dating the graves

Until now the archaeological evidence which would allow us to establish the relative chronology of these burials was not available. Only the coins permit their placement within a broad timeframe. Setting aside the Indian medallion, there are five coins to consider. Three of these are more or less connected with Parthian coinage. In addition there is an *obol* of Heraios, connected with the Yuezhi, and a Roman Tiberian *aureus* (cat. no. 95), struck in Gaul in 16-37 AD and certainly not after 37 AD, which provides the most precise date. The fact that there were two different types of coins (cat. nos. 95 and 96) in a single grave, with at least a century between them, demonstrates that we must be cautious, and not underestimate the period of circulation of these coins. This is especially true in the case of nomads, for whom prestige weighed more heavily than monetary value. This is well exemplified by the Scythian bracteates depicting an owl or a rooster, derived from Greek coins, and by the manner in which nomadic women from Central Asia still sew pre-1917 rubles or kopecks on their veils or use them to decorate necklaces. Nevertheless it seems reasonable to assume that the most recent coin, the Tiberian *aureus*, which must date from 37 AD at the latest, and probably reached Tillya-tepe fairly quickly (by sea, and then via southern or central India, where such coins have not infrequently been found) must be fairly close



Bracteates in situ on the skeleton of the male from grave IV
Photograph Vladimir Terebenin



Dagger from Dachi (Azov Sea) and associated sheath
Photograph Vladimir Terebenin

Tillya-tepe, grave IV, dagger with gold handle, rear (cat. no. 114)
Photograph Thierry Ollivier



in date to the burial itself. The fact that no coins of later date were encountered supports this assumption.

In order to go further than this we would need clear indications about the relative chronology of the individual graves. There are certain factors which suggest that they all date from the same period. Firstly there is the similarity of the structure of the graves, then the strong consistency between certain objects found within them, and most of all the premeditated, hierarchical manner of the burials, with the females surrounding the solitary male. It would be reassuring if this could be explained as the consequence of a bloody battle or an epidemic, since the notion that five or perhaps even more women followed their lord and master to their deaths is not terribly appealing. However we know from Herodotus (IV, 71), as well as from various other excavations, that after his death a man did not go alone to the hereafter, but was accompanied by his 'household'. And if we are to believe the same Herodotus (IV, 72), they did not scruple to sacrifice fifty young people in honour of the deceased, a year after his death. It is therefore quite possible, even probable, that we have here a leader accompanied in death by the womenfolk among his followers. If that were the case, the funerary rites must have taken place at the end of the first quarter or during the second quarter of the first century AD.

The Parthian coins tell a different kind of story. The Parthians had a good deal of contact with nomads in the second and first centuries BC. Sometimes they attacked them directly, other times they drove them back, or at any rate held them at bay sufficiently to stabilise the situation on their

eastern borders. According to the travel journal *Parthian Stations* written by Isidore of Charax at the start of the first century AD, the whole of the west of modern Afghanistan (the Herat region and the Sistan province) was under Parthian rule at the start of the modern era. Parthian coins with a countermark were also found, raising the suspicion that tribal leaders and minor nomad rulers had acquired the right to mint coins. This is confirmed by the imitation in gold of a Parthian coin from grave VI (cat. no. 146). This was an unexpected find, since all coins, whether Graeco-Bactrian or of Parthian origin, as well as those that may have been struck by local chiefs, were of silver or bronze. A coinage system based on a gold standard was only introduced later under Vima Kadphises and the rule of the Kushana. So, the discovery, in the hand of the female in grave VI, of a gold coin displaying affinities with Arsacid (Parthian) coinage points to her clan's link with the Parthians.

Garments, weapons and jewellery

One can read in the catalogue entries about the function and nature of some of the garments, jewellery and weapons. It is important to remember the difficult and uncertain nature of certain identifications. Since virtually no textiles have survived, the clothing of these long-dead people can only be reconstructed by looking carefully at the gold jewellery – brooches, clasps and bracteates – and the manner in which these were placed. However this is anything but simple. How are we to distinguish, among a profusion of materials, almost all stitched with gold thread, between the veil over the cist, the shroud and the dead person's own clothing? The clothing itself also consisted of various layers: a shirt, tunic, jacket and cloak, one on top of the other. The male probably wore a short jacket and a kaftan, with trousers tucked into high leggings, as can be seen on the large bronze statue of a Parthian ruler from Shami (south-west Iran) in the museum at Teheran.

The costumes of the women from the different graves were not completely identical. This may be because the women did not necessarily belong to the same tribe, or more probably because they did not all have the same social status. It has, for example, been suggested that the female in grave V was possibly a young woman, who had not yet had children. All the women did however wear the type of garb that is still very common in this part of the world, the *shalwar kameez*, a tunic over trousers. The man's weapons – two bows, a long sword, a dagger with a four-lobed sheath, and an additional sheath for various knives – are all characteristic of the nomads. Like the horse, present here but no longer buried next to its rider, and also the four-lobed sheath, which was originally intended to secure the weapon tightly to the upper leg so that it could not hurt the rider when galloping, but which has here, obviously, an ostentatious function, it seems that the belt was worn more as a sign of power than to gird the waist. We are dealing therefore not with a common horseman but with a knight, a warlord, buried without a helmet or armour, probably because these were part of the actual fighting equipment and could not be counted as symbols displaying power. Head ornaments, pendants on either side of the face, earrings, necklaces, bracelets, anklets, rings in abundance – the briefest glance at these objects leaves no doubt as to their magnificence and great variety. What is less clear are the traditions,

models and influences which determined the forms and decoration of these objects and which the catalogue entries attempt to point out. One significant step forward came from the investigation of the gold and gems conducted by Thomas Calligaro of the Laboratoire des Musées de France, to whom we are indebted for their identification. Perhaps one day we will thus be able to gain a greater understanding of the relationship between the objects from Tillya-tepe and those of Peter the Great's Siberian collection, the world of nomadic tribes like the Sarmatians, the Alani, and the Great Migrations.

Even though the iconography of the Tillya-tepe artefacts may sometimes seem strange to us, because the models which inspired them have been misinterpreted by their makers, nevertheless, the astonishingly high standard of the goldsmith's work can only stir our admiration. Little or no filigree work is evident, but there is surprisingly deft granulation and virtuoso inlay work.

Who were the makers of these superb objects? All the evidence indicates that a good number of the objects came from the same workshop. In the absence of a visual vocabulary, which would have required adaptation if borrowed from an external source, the tricks of the trade were transmitted from generation to generation in the same manner as can still be observed today in goldsmith's shops in India.

Composite art

As it has been said – and can also be seen in the catalogue entries – the art of Tillya-tepe is a mixture. There are Chinese objects or imitations, objects from India or which reflect Indian traditions, and above all Hellenistic traditions, even more apparent in the style than in the thematic repertoire, the latter being closely associated with ancient animal motifs from the art of the steppes. Nomadic art is almost universally characterised by its eclecticism, except perhaps at Arzhan (southern Siberia), but that is perhaps due in part to our lack of knowledge about it. One thinks for example of the art of the Altai (also in Siberia), which both in the east and the west is largely based on borrowing, or of the finds from Filippovka in the southern Urals, which have continued to surprise us even this year, and of course of the admirable monstrosity that characterises, in terms of aesthetics, Graeco-Scythian art.

The mixture we see here is sometimes bizarre in effect, and the images are not always free of visual misunderstandings. So for example we have the goddess Athena, her arm extended to hold a lance, but the lance is absent. In another case she is shown sitting, but without any seat. Elsewhere the small 'Kushana Aphrodite' figure is standing erect between what can only be the pillars of a throne. It is also puzzling that certain well-known motifs are absent, such as the Bactrian camel, which oddly enough is to be found on the pommel of the four-lobed dagger from Dachi on the Sea of Azov in southern Russia.

However there is one motif that occurs so frequently in these graves that it cannot be purely a matter of coincidence or due to the personal preference of the artists, and that is the heart motif. Be it smooth or faceted, wide or long, inlaid or not, there is not a single grave where the heart was not found in some form. These artefacts are often in turquoise and from an artistic perspective this is quite an undertaking, as it is more difficult to shape turquoise into the form of a heart than it is to produce a comma or a circle. If no one until now has noticed this obvious omnipresence,



Bactrian camel on the pommel
of the Dachi dagger (Azov Sea)
Photograph Vladimir Terebenin



Gold images from the Siberian collection

of Peter the Great

Photograph Vladimir Terebenin

it is no doubt because the heart has become such a common motif that we have turned blind to it. We also need to be careful not to misinterpret it. The heart here does not represent a 'lady of the heart', or warm feelings. We will understand the meaning of the motif if we look at the rear of the handle of the dagger with the four-lobed sheath (cat. no. 114), which shows the stem of a plant leaf. This is not the heart-shaped leaf of sarsaparilla, water lily or poplar, but probably an ivy leaf. The question remains why this plant should have such a prominent place among the weaponry of this leader. In fact, despite what we might expect, this motif was not so common in ancient times. It certainly needs further investigation.

In conclusion

The most important historical problem raised by this necropolis has intentionally been left aside until now: which nomadic tribe was responsible for Tillya-tepe? Was it the Yuezhi, driven from the steppes of northwest China with the rise of the Xiongnu Kingdom around the second century BC, who destroyed Ai Khanum, and, once they had crossed the Oxus, settled there? Or was it, as the great number of connections suggests, the Sakas or Sakarauks, moving within the sphere of influence of the Parthian state, and who perhaps had always been in this area? To which tribe did the nomads buried at Tillya-tepe belong? Where were the grazing lands of their parents and grandparents?

The nomads were very numerous, infinitely more numerous than we might imagine, as their numbers declined steeply with the rise of the great sedentary states. We should probably interpret their movement forward less in terms of conquest and enmity and more in terms of sheer

numbers. We should also remember that their world was like a sea with its waves, its eddies, its whirlwinds which mixed up the waters, not to speak of the difficulty of identifying nomadic groups by name (cf. Schiltz 2002, pp. 874-877).

We are beginning to know more about the people of Kangju, a state north of Bactria (in Chorasmia and Sogdiana). But what was the situation of this oasis of Sheberghan, backed by the Hindu Kush but open to the steppes? It is true that the major centres of Bactra and Dilberjin lay less than a hundred kilometres distant, but could it not have been far enough for Tillya-tepe to escape Yuezhi influence, while the Sheberghan oasis remained active on the great trading route of the East? This would have been a situation comparable with the ethnic diversity of the present population of the area, with its many and various warlords. Things being what they are, it is vain to look for a perfect adequation between race, language and culture, not to mention artistic forms. And this is perhaps the most important lesson to draw from this superb collection of finds: that all art represents an alloy and that the Afghan soil was the crucible for this unique alloy.

SI-109



Begram: the Alexandria of the Caucasus, or the capital city of the Kushan Empire

Pierre Cambon

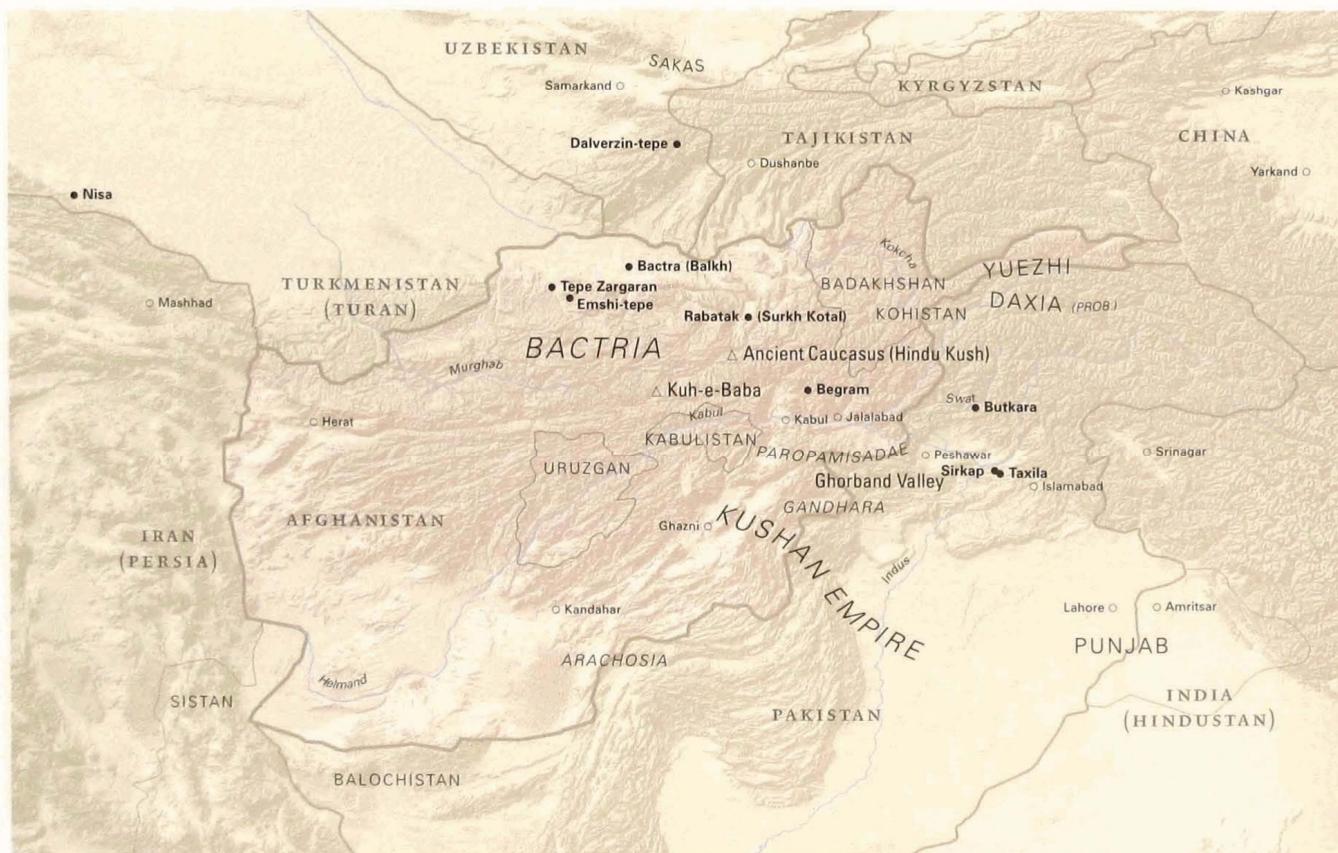
Introduction: explorers' reports

In his *Memoirs*, General Claude-Auguste Court (1793-1861) wrote 'There are hardly any regions in Asia which are as picturesque as Kabulistan'; in this journal, he relates his journey through central Persia and Afghanistan from 1826 to 1843¹. (Kabulistan is an old term, which roughly designates eastern Afghanistan and the Pakistani borderlands). 'Because the ground level is situated nearly twelve thousand feet above sea level, the air is absolutely pure. Vast mountains can be seen where an untainted nature reveals a harsh but vigorous beauty; the herds graze on fertile and sweet-smelling meadows in the hills, open plains and valleys supply every product available in a temperate climate, and everywhere, crystal-clear streams bring this spectacle to life. Nothing is as regal', he continues, 'as the Hindu Kush covered with eternal snow and framed by a pristine blue sky in good weather in the spring and autumn seasons! Such natural beauty is extremely rare' (*op. cit.* pp. 93-94). Following this enchanting description of the natural environment, this French General adds some technical and military reflections combined with reminiscences of his classical education: 'Moreover, nature made this region into one of the most fantastic military places on earth. Virtually impregnable strategic points can be found everywhere; a small division of determined soldiers could hold one of these against any of the best armies. The brilliant Alexander knew how to appreciate these benefits and decided to found the capital of Paropamisadae there, called Alexandria. He thought that the region was so similar to his own country that he established a settlement of seven thousand old Macedonians; according to Arrianus they were governed by Nicanor and Tyriaspes as the satrap. Diodorus however writes that Oxyartes, the father of Alexander's wife Roxana, was chosen as satrap' (*op. cit.* p. 94). The region was situated at a major crossing between Iran and Central Asia, 'the old route to India, from Bactra to Taxila'. Court emphasises: 'Since the beginning of time Kabul has

been the link connecting two major thoroughfares between Iran and Turan, or from Persia and Turkmenistan to Hindustan, and it should be considered the Hindustan "avenue" and the tactical point where all the Mahometan brigands started their plundering sprees in the region' (*op. cit.* p. 94). Besides, Kabulistan is situated in a favourable location, in the middle of the plains surrounded by mountains (the Kohistan plains). Court describes the location as follows (*op. cit.* p. 96): 'The region is situated at the southern side of the Caucasus, which stands as proud as the Hindu Kush on its right and the Kuh-e Baba on its left. Together, these mountains, shaped like a horseshoe, surround the whole of Kohistan, with Kabul situated in the gap. And although it is unlikely that Kabul is the Alexandria of the Caucasus, it cannot have been far off'. The exact location of Alexandria still needs to be found, but Court was convinced that 'it is evident that the location of this city is closely connected to the Kophenes River, its main sources being the Kabul and the Panjshir' (*op. cit.* p. 96).

A little further (*op. cit.* p. 98) Court mentions a number of characteristics from the Kabul area without making any specific connections: 'In the Ghorband district in Kohistan, a subterranean cave can be found not far from the village of Farendjel; it is a wild and daunting place. This could well be the cave called "the cave of Prometheus" by the Ancient Greeks from Alexander's epoch. In Kohistan can also be found the remains of Begram, an ancient city which did not receive much attention from French orientalists. However, if this city's origin had been identified, it might well shed some light on Bactria, a region that has not been clearly defined until now. Its inhabitants sometimes make remarkable discoveries, mainly Bactrian and Indo-Scythian coins, in addition to Persian, Parthian and Sasanian coins, which proves that Bactria was ruled by these particular dynasties. However, it is worth mentioning that there is a rather large amount of Indian coins too, which are older than the rest and this may well indicate that the area was ruled by Indian kings in earlier times.' Next he itemises 'the various coins that I acquired through the *nawab* Djabbar-Khan', where Court does not hesitate to provide his own interpretation of the history, including occasional surprising remarks (*op. cit.* pp. 98-99): 'Among the Bactrian coins, there is one coin with the head of Amyntas, a Macedonian general, who was appointed governor of Bactria by Alexander when he marched upon the Indus Valley; one coin with the head of Euthydemus, the Bactrian king who was defeated by Antiochus

Buddhist myth, calcareous marble, Amaravati School,
Nagarjunakonda
MNA-Guimet, MG 17067; Donation C.T. Loo and Jouveau-Dubreuil
Photograph Musée Guimet



Afghanistan (bottom) and wider environs (top)
around and near the time of Begram

Overview of the Begram excavations

The excavations in Begram covered a total of ten years, although publication was sporadic and there is no final summary:

1936, April-July, project I, under the supervision of Jean Carl and Jacques Meunié, the Bazaar (Hackin – Carl – Meunié 1959, p. 85);
1937, project II, under the supervision of Ria Hackin, chamber 10 (the first treasure chamber) (Hackin 1939);

1938, April-June, project II continues, under the supervision of Jacques Meunié: extension of chamber 10 to the west, the Qal'ah (Hackin – Carl – Meunié 1959, p. 103); new project started, Project III, under the supervision of Jacques Meunié: a building with four round turrets, 400 m south of the city wall, the same type as the Qal'ah in project II (*ibid.*, p. 104);
1939-1940, project II, under the supervision of Ria Hackin, chamber 13 (the second treasure-chamber, immediately to the north of chamber 10) (Hackin 1954);

1941-1942, under the supervision of Roman Ghirshman, west of the previous excavations (Ghirshman 1946);

1946, September-October, under the supervision of Jacques Meunié, south entrance of the 'new royal city'. Attempt to connect with the Bazaar excavations and the so-called 'city wall road' by Ghirshman (Hackin – Carl – Meunié 1959), p. 107).

the Great; one coin with the head of Demetrius, his son, who shared the above kingdom, which in India then stretched to Pattalene, with Menander; and one coin with the head of Eucratides, who conspired with the Parthians to overthrow Demetrius, although in the end he was murdered by his own son. The obverse sides of the Persian coins always carry the holy fire flanked by two warriors or mages. There are also a few very old coins, where the sovereigns are wearing the Indian headpiece rather than the customary *mitra*. The inscriptions are in Old Persian. The Parthian coins can be recognised by the representation of an archer surrounded by dotted Greek letters. The Indo-Scythian coins consist of a depiction of Mokadphisis, Kanerkhis, Ashoka and Kanishka from the Koranos dynasty. The poor quality of the Greek inscriptions indicates a rough civilisation and hints at the fact that these rulers might have originated from the Greek settlement established by Alexander; because of their Macedonian origin, they would have perceived Koranos as Caranus, the founder of the Macedonian monarchy. If this is not the case, I believe that these rulers may have Persian rather than Scythian origins. The holy fire over which they appear to make sacrifices, the *mitra*, the Persian garments and the *toppous* [top knot], all these clues seem to reinforce my

opinion. I suspect that these monarchs were sovereign rulers of Kabulistan and the mountains on both sides of the Indus River, from the snow-covered mountains to Balochistan, and the Hydaspes River formed the eastern border of their realm. And since the inhabitants claim that all these regions were once occupied by the Kafir tribes, one is inclined to believe that the current Kafir people or Siah-posh people are descendants of these tribes, who came here because they did not want to convert to Mahometism and entrenched themselves in the snow-covered mountains where they still reside.'

From this historical overview, in which General Court combines the traditional Bactrian sources from the Greek epoch with legends of the Kafir people who, according to some, could be the distant descendants of Alexander the Great's soldiers, the following successive dynasties seem to emerge: the Greek period (from the Bactrian kingdom which was founded in 250 BC by Diodotus up to the Indo-Greek rulers, of whom Hermaeus was the last king to reign over the Kabul river valley around the beginning of our era²); the period of invasions (from the Indo-Scythian to the Indo-Parthian, with king Gondophares who reigned over Taxila and who, according to some, may have conquered the Kabul valley);

Begram, 1926
Photograph Musée Guimet



the Kushan nomadic empire with king Kanishka as head figure, whose dates of birth and of death have remained controversial for many years; and finally, the Sasanian or rather Kushan-Sasanian period, during which the Kushan rulers came under the influence of Iranian dynasties. This summary demonstrates how many coins were found in Begram and the surrounding area and, along with Greek and Chinese historical sources, it provides a good source of information.

This numismatic profusion is also confirmed by the Englishman Charles Masson (1800-1853), whose underlings examined the area systematically. 'Before the commencement of winter, when the plain, covered with snow, is of course closed to research, I had accumulated one thousand eight hundred and sixty-five copper coins, beside a few silver ones, many rings, signets, and other relics. The next year, 1834, the collection which fell into my hands amounted to one thousand nine hundred copper coins, beside other relics. In 1835, it increased to nearly two thousand five hundred copper coins, and in 1836 it augmented to thirteen thousand four hundred and seventy-four copper coins. In 1837, when I had the plain well under control, and was enabled constantly to locate my people upon it, I obtained sixty thousand copper coins, a result at which I was well pleased, having at an early period of my researches conjectured that so many as thirty thousand coins might annually be procured. The whole series of coins, and other antiquities from Begram, with several thousands of other coins, brought to light in various parts of Afghanistan, have been forwarded to the Honourable the East India Company' (Masson 1842, pp. 148-149). Masson, extremely satisfied with this treasure hunt, managed to turn it into a lucrative business, which was run in a systematic, almost industrial manner. However, he was also interested in the underlying importance of this inexhaustible wealth. 'Notwithstanding the vast numbers of relics discovered on the plain, other evidences that a city once stood on it are not so palpable as to have attracted extraordinary attention, had it not been imperatively directed to the locality from the circumstance of the discovery of the numerous and singular antique treasures at it. In many places, indeed, it has been proved, that by digging about a yard in depth, lines of cement, seeming to denote the outlines of structures and their apartments, may be found' (*op. cit.* p. 154). He then adds: 'If asked to assign the site of the city, I should, fixing the enormous square enclosure south of Burj-i Abdullah as the fort, or citadel, locate it between those remains and the western portion of the plain, or towards Killa Bolend and Mahighir, in which space coins are found in far less number, while scoriae, lamps of iron, fragments of glazed earthenware are found more abundantly than in other spots' (*op. cit.* p. 157). 'The traditions of the country', the English explorer observes, 'assert the city of Begram to have been the Sheher-Yunan, or Greek city, overwhelmed by some natural catastrophe, and the evidence of its subterranean lines and apartments is appealed to in support of them' (*op. cit.* p. 159).

Excavations in Begram

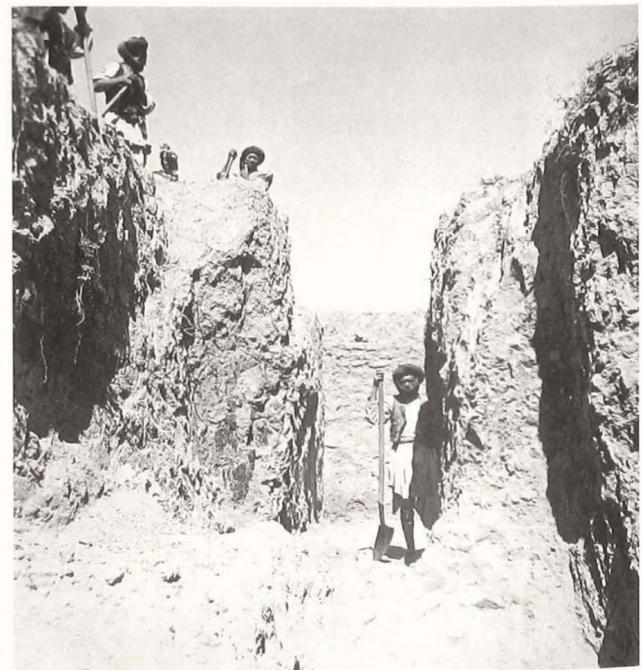
The actual excavations

It appears from the above-mentioned excerpts that ancient artefacts in Afghanistan have been unearthed for many years. However, systematic archaeological research did not commence until the creation of the Délégation Archéologique Française en Afghanistan (DAFA) in 1922.



Omphale teaches Heracles to spin, plaster cast
Chersonesus, Crimea
Photograph Musée Guimet

In 1923, the DAFA archaeologist Alfred Fouche started recording the descriptions of Begram. In a report dated 15 April, he states that Begram is Kapsi, the ancient capital city of the Kapisa region, mentioned in the travelling accounts of the Chinese pilgrim Xuanzang or Hsan-Tsang (602-664). Fouche however does not believe the city to be the former Alexandria of the Caucasus, since he thought this was situated more to the west. He describes the excavations as follows: 'In the northwest, a major river, which springs from the Ghorband and the Panshir



Begram, project II, entrance to chamber 10
Photograph Musée Guimet, DAFA fund

confluence, batters against old square city walls (200 x 100 m), now called Burj-i Abdullah; 500 m further, another big square (450 x 150 m) implies that there was a second “royal city”, connected at the south-eastern side with the first one by sun-dried clay walls. Outside these walls, which have a circumference of around 2500 m, were the outer villages, burial-grounds still filled with urns, and the religious buildings of the old city’ (Foucher 1942, p. 140). Foucher ends his report about Kohistan as follows: ‘Excavation works must be carried out as soon as possible especially in the Kapisa Begram vicinity because the proceeds may well turn out to be particularly interesting’ (*op. cit.* p. 144). In 1936, the DAFA began the excavation works at the place Foucher called the ‘new’ royal city. In 1937, a second archaeological excavation started, in the east of the city, beside the main road that travels from north to south. It is here that the Begram treasure would have been discovered. This treasure was carefully hidden in two adjacent walled chambers (chambers 10 and 13), but was revealed in respectively 1937 and 1939.

Interpretation of the excavations

The rather spectacular treasure of Begram was nearly overlooked and only found by accident in 1937; at that time, the explorers did not really appreciate what they were excavating, and the research is not entirely completed, even now. Nevertheless, in July 1925 Jouveau-Dubreuil, who was studying itineraries and roadmaps in Begram on behalf of Foucher, concluded: ‘There is therefore no doubt whatsoever regarding the location of the city founded by Alexander. The “new city” discovered by Foucher, 500 m south of Burj-i Abdullah, is nothing other than the famous Alexandria of the Caucasus.’ A little further on, Jouveau-Dubreuil becomes nearly nationalistic about the archaeological possibilities of the excavations: ‘It is imperative that we exploit our findings and we must not leave it to

a few English and German researchers to unearth the Indo-Greek city, and especially the old capital city Kapisa. [...] France must seize every opportunity it gets to preserve its reputation. We must not forget that the whole past of India could depend on these excavations at the foot of the Hindu Kush. An archaeological “office” needs to be built on the Kapisa ruins. It is pointless to look any further. Considering that all the funds for Indian archaeology have been slumbering in Taxila for years. We must do in Burj-i Abdullah what England did in Taxila.’ Jouveau-Dubreuil’s assignment was cut short because of an insurrection of the local Mangal tribe, but Jules Barthoux inspected the site in December of the same year, following in Foucher’s wake. However, he lacked the vision and outlook Jouveau-Dubreuil had shown. And his mindset was totally different: ‘The cultures that covered more than half of the ruins were a nuisance, but wherever they were absent, I only found buildings the locations of which clearly indicated a meticulously built city’ (research report, Musée Guimet archive).

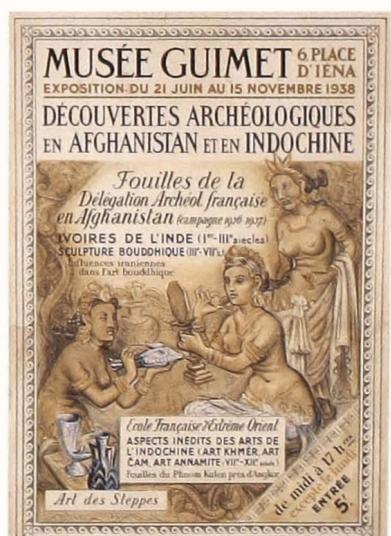
When looking at the ground plans of the excavations, there are no doubts whatsoever that there was an authentic city here once. The earlier mentioned Xuanzang named it Kapsi, capital city of Kapisa (a power centre and summer residence of Emperor Kanishka from the Kushan Empire). However, the question of whether Begram was the actual ‘Alexandria of the Caucasus’ remained controversial for a long time (Hackin 1939, p. 4). The discovery of the treasure upset everything, as it confirmed that the archaeological sources in Afghanistan were not limited to the Macedonian warrior’s expedition, since as well as artefacts from the Mediterranean area, the treasure also contained Chinese lacquer ware and Indian ivory. According to Joseph Hackin, the artefacts from the Mediterranean area had to be Roman, for want of older reference material, whilst the Chinese lacquer ware must originate from the Han Dynasty (206 BC-200 AD).



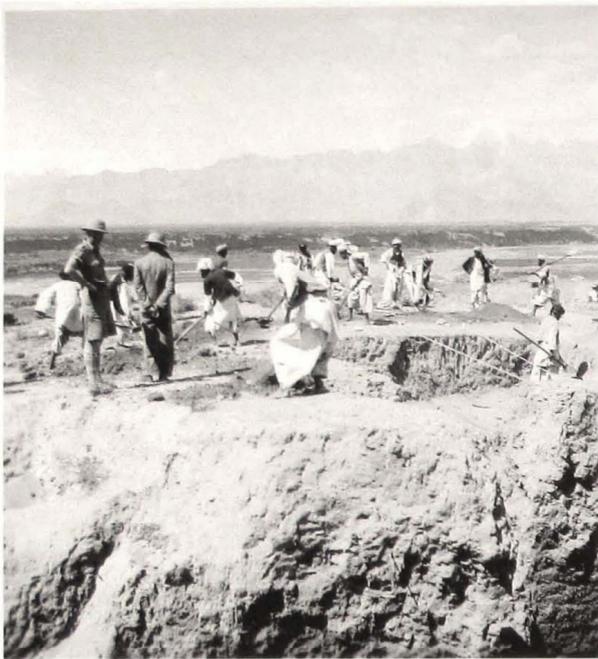
Begram, 1937, Girl with bird, ivory
National Museum of Afghanistan
Photograph Musée Guimet, DAFA fund



Begram, chamber 10,
skeleton found at a depth of 1.60 m
Photograph Musée Guimet, DAFA fund



Musée Guimet, 1938
Photograph Musée Guimet



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Begram, 1939, project II
Photograph Musée Guimet, DAFA fund

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Begram, 1937, chamber 10, Jean Carl, Ahmed Ali Khan
and Aslam Khan
Foto Musée Guimet, DAFA-fonds

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Begram, 1939, project II
Photograph Musée Guimet,
DAFA fund

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Begram, 1939, chamber 13
Photograph Musée Guimet,
DAFA fund

This is why he places the treasure in the Kushan Empire. In those times the area which is now Afghanistan was the major junction where the Roman Empire of Augustus and the Han Empire met under Emperor Kanishka. This viewpoint seems to be confirmed by Stern's study of the Indian ivory (Hackin 1954).

The controversy about the treasure still exists due to several causes: firstly, the excavations remained unfinished. The archaeologists of 1937 were thwarted by the war, and although their death gave their work a heroic importance, the reports remained incomplete. And they were published

by others, right after the Second World War³. Between 1938 and 1946, some excavations were done, but without any structural character. No general drawings were published, nor have the various approaches been itemised to create an overall picture of the excavations in Begram. There is no understanding of the context of the most famous excavation, project II (see box on p. 67), although Ghirshman did publish a general ground plan. The Buddhist monuments around the city have not been mentioned either. However, one drawing of project II (Hackin 1954, p. 9) is available, but this was only made much later: in 1947 to be precise, by DAFA architect Marc Le Berre, because an earlier sketch made by Jean Carl in 1940 was lost. If we compare it with a drawing of the extension excavations in 1938 towards the west of the site (*op. cit.* 1959, p. 103) it appears clearly that a Qal'ah, a building with four round turrets, was built on older layers and that this Qal'ah annexed part of the older building where the treasure was found.

Interpretation and dating of the treasure

The second problem is the treasure itself. Although it generates admiration, it also creates problems for those who wish to interpret it. Firstly, there is virtually no reference material pertaining to the age of the Roman artefacts, more particularly the glassware; and secondly because no comparative material is known for the ivory, except for one piece originating in Pompeii.

Neither the eastern nor the western context offers any foothold for dating the artefacts, whether it involves the Indian or the Roman civilisation. Bronze statues have been found in Taxila, where the ancient Graeco-Parthian city Sirkap stood. These statues hint at some coherence, but there is not enough evidence to create a definite chronological sequence. Extremely contradictory theories persist regarding the dating of the Indian kingdom of Gandhara, and this is also certainly the case for the Kushan Empire, depending on the interpretations and discoveries. On the subject of the ivory: the only historic reference to Indian ivory carvers is an inscription on the Great Stupa of Sanchi in central India, which states that one of the stone bas-reliefs was a present from the ivory carvers' guild of Vidisha. But it does not provide any precise dates (Hackin 1939, p. 12, add. 1). However, research by Otto Kurz on western artefacts and by Vadime Elisséeff regarding the Chinese lacquer ware in the treasure made it possible to date at least part of the treasure back⁴ to the beginning of our era.

In fact the chronology sometimes changed during the excavations. Hackin had various opinions in his publications, although he had practically no time to consider the differences. In 1938 he estimated in his *Recherches Archéologiques à Begram* (published one year later, Hackin 1939) that the treasure dated back to a period between the first and fourth century AD, based on the western artefacts and Indian ivory. 'The abundant glassware (found in chamber 10) undeniably originates from the small glass workshops on the Phoenician coast (Tyre, Sidon, etc.) which were extremely famous in Antiquity. Most of the glassware we excavated has been dated and classified. For instance, the exquisite *millefiori*-type plate (first century AD), the ribbed *phiale* (first or second century AD), the vase and goblets (third century AD), the small fish-shaped flagons (third century AD), and the vases and goblets with *resille* patterns (late third-early fourth century AD). [...] The bronze bowls and weights could be from the second or even third century AD and it is interesting to point out that a bronze coin from Kanishka was found alongside a bronze bowl, and that

two Kushan coins [he does not indicate which ones] were found in the hollow space of the holder for these bowls.' He ends on a positive note: 'This part of our discovery, which originates from the eastern Roman Empire, can therefore be dated back to a period between the first and fourth century AD [...]. The Begram treasure proves that interactions between this part of Asia and the eastern Roman Empire continued at least until the beginning of the fourth century AD' (*op. cit.* p. 10). He uses the same argumentation for the ivory, this time based on the ornamentation of the famous casket IX. His conclusions are unequivocal: 'I certainly don't hesitate', he writes (*op. cit.* p. 22), 'to place all ornamentations of casket IX, the zoomorphic representations and scenes of human figures on large panels, within the margins of Gupta art. I expect the approximate dating to be between the end of the third and the beginning of the fourth century AD, because these ivory sculptures are the precursors of the extraordinary imperial Gupta art.'

However, in 1940 Hackin again changes the chronology. In *Nouvelles Recherches Archéologiques à Begram* (quotations are from a version published in 1954, Hackin 1954) he associates the treasure of Begram with the rise of the Kushan Empire, which occurred a little after the beginning of our era. With as much verve as in his previous publications he states (*op. cit.* p. 14): 'The Begram discoveries, Hellenistic plaster casts, Graeco-Roman



Begram, 1937, chamber 10, glass
Photograph Musée Guimet, DAFA fund

Begram, 1937, chamber 10, bronze statues
Photograph Musée Guimet, DAFA fund

or Alexandrine bronze statues, Roman utensils, Indian ivory and Chinese lacquer ware all show an exceptional synchronism in time, and they mainly involve the first and second century AD.⁷ He also provides a clear delimitation by emphasising the connection between the Begram treasure and the rule of Kujula Kadphises, the founder of the Kushan Empire (presumably around 30-80 AD). Hackin summarises his new viewpoint as follows: 'The Scythian tribal chief who overthrew a Greek kingdom and acquired Turkish and Chinese titles rallied to the Roman school at the end of his career.' Hackin does not substantiate his volte-face, but his theory is accidentally supported by the Chinese lacquer ware from the Han Dynasty (first-second century AD) and the Kujula Kadphises coins found 'next to the Roman artefacts' in chamber 13. He believes that the latest dated artefacts of the treasure of Begram indicate a weakening of the Kushan power. 'Not a single coin can be dated back to the period after Vasudeva (circa 200 AD)', he states (*op. cit.* p. 15), 'because the decline of the Kushan dynasty began in the third century AD due to its increasing submission to the Sasanians.'

Subsequent research and questions about the treasure of Begram

The questions generated by the treasure of Begram are extremely diverse:

The genesis: the Begram excavations yielded coins associated with Hermaeus, the last Indo-Greek monarch to rule in the valley of the Kabul

River before the nomadic invasion (cf. Hackin – Carl – Meunié 1959, p. 141). He was probably the earliest ruler with whom Begram coins have been associated, a good reason to place the treasure's initial stages in his reign; a short time later may also be possible because old coins from his period have been 'reused' by other rulers. Unfortunately, Hermaeus's precise reign is not known. Some believe he ruled over the Kabul Valley until 70 BC (Bopearachchi hypothesis), and that nomad rulers⁵ succeeded him. In this case, the theory that the treasure dates back to the Emperor Kanishka (based on the buildings in Begram) cannot be accurate, because his reign occurred much later, whether it is dated to between 100 and 120 AD (Rabatak inscriptions), 78 AD (the Séart hypothesis), or 144 AD (Ghirshman's theory). If Hermaeus's fall is attributed to the arrival of the Indo-Scythians, then the treasure must originate some time during the Indo-Parthian period, during king Gondophares's reign over Taxila (Cribb – Errington 1992, p. 15). In a text on Taxila (Marshall 1912-1913), Marshall even writes that Gondophares annexed the Kabul Valley around 30 AD (and Hermaeus's reign would not have faltered before then). After the discovery of the Rabatak inscriptions the invasion date for the Kabul Valley was kept at 30 AD, although it was attributed to Kujula Kadphises, the founder of the nomadic Kushan dynasty (who ruled from 30 to 80 AD). Woodcock (1966, p. 127) develops the following scenario: Hermaeus's fall dated back to 30 AD and was 'the joint work of the Kushan – who by this time had expelled the Saka from Bactria – and the Parthian forces advancing on an East and West pincer movement to the South of the Hindu Kush.' In short, the number of different theories is considerable, which makes the story unclear.

Dating the secret cache: should this be placed in the Kushan dynasty, just before the Sasanian ruler Shapur I invaded Kapsi (Begram) in 241 AD, as implicitly suggested by Hackin and maintained by Ghirshman? To Ghirshman, this is even more logical because the end of Vasudeva's rule (his head is minted on the latest coin) also occurred in 241 AD (Ghirshman 1946). Stern also adopts this theory (in: Hackin 1954, p. 53). *The location in the excavation complex:* Why was it situated in what was called the 'new royal city' by Foucher and not in the citadel or the upper town?

The meaning: is this merely a treasure (Hackin)? Or rather a supply of commercial goods (Mehendale)? Or is it a votive present from nomad caravans (Veyne)?

The layout of the treasure: in two closed chambers with small benches along the walls and with rational categorisation, bronze with bronze, glass with glass, ivory with ivory, and even the glass artefacts are sorted into painted or cut glass. The reason for this arrangement is unknown.

The dating: the Chinese lacquer ware and western artefacts probably date back to the same period (early first century AD); the Indian ivory might be from a later date. These inconsistencies generated a controversy regarding the dating. Although there is a certain amount of comparative material, it is awfully limited: for the Chinese lacquer ware, lacquered artefacts from Pyongyang, the Chinese commandery in Lolang (Nangrang in Korean); for the glass artefacts there are the uncommon exemplars which were found at the borders of the Graeco-Roman world (in Scandinavia and the Rhineland and even in Sudan, in the ancient Kingdom of Merowe); for the plaster artefacts, except for the themes from Graeco-Roman sculpture, the emblemata discovered on the banks of the Bosphorus and the Chersonesus (Crimea), and in Egypt; for the bronze statues and the silverware there is the Sirkap example; and for the ivory, there



Begram, 1937. Statuette of a 'river goddess', ivory
National Museum of Afghanistan
Photograph Musée Guimet



Painted glass, Hans Cohn Collection,
Los Angeles County Museum of Art
Photograph Pierre Cambon

are the Dalverzin-tepe and Tillya-tepe excavations, not to mention Khotan (in present-day China) and Pompeii.

The collected items: these are extremely diverse and on the whole, of very good quality, although they have no financial value (the coins and modest gold found in the treasure were not used as a means of payment, and there were no precious stones). However, various curiosities were found, such as an ostrich egg in a *rhyton* (drinking horn), some type of bronze aquaria in which fishes would float around on a minuscule chain as soon as the tanks were filled with water, porphyry pieces and two golden appliqués shaped like elephant heads. In addition, there are pieces of coral and cut glass with lapis lazuli beads, delicate pieces, but nevertheless used as daily implements by the nobility (see the dozen bronze bowls which were found as a matching set). These objects of diverging quality caused no end of amazement. 'How can one reconcile', wrote Will (1955), 'the fact that valuable objects such as Indian ivory furniture were found next to Graeco-Roman plaster casts of objects which only had practical functions?'

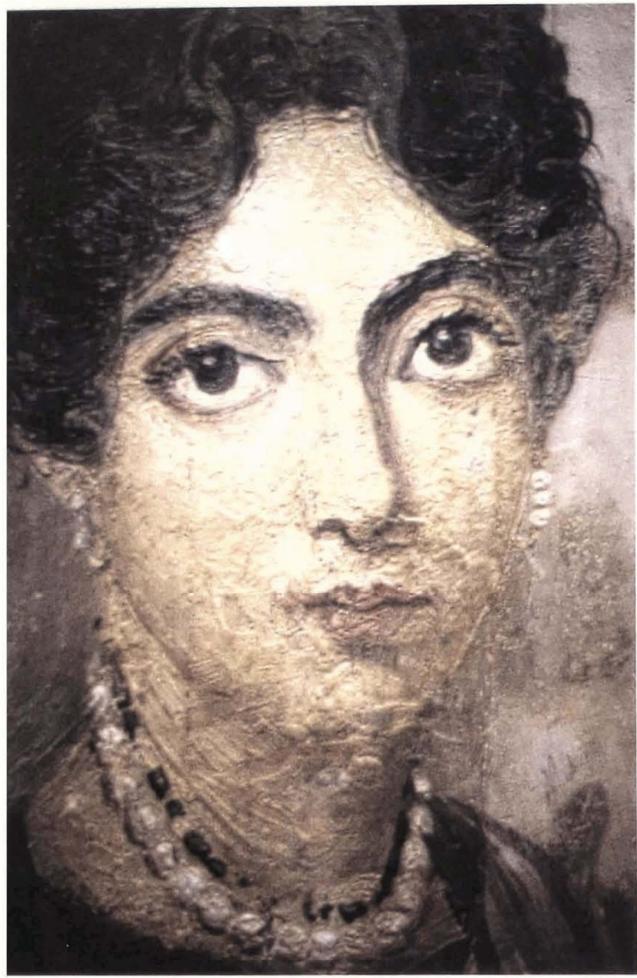
Below we shall describe the problems generated by the treasure's layout, and then the dating system will be discussed. One remark needs to be made however: when describing the layout, dating concerns will inevitably arise once in a while.

The treasure enigma may well never be solved completely because of a lack of written documents. The archives left by Hackin and the drawings

from Carl are often incomplete and difficult to decipher. We must therefore take the excavations as they come, with their limitations, and place them in the 1930s context. Even so, Pierre Hamelin, who worked as a restorer in Begram on behalf of Hackin, tried to reconstruct as much as possible based on his own experience and Carl's entries. He became involved with the glass and ivory both at the Musée Guimet in Paris and at the National Museum of Afghanistan. After a few hesitations, he suggested considering the ivory pieces as furniture, a type of throne with an ivory canopy and footstools.

The Chinese and western objects had some (common) structure, and even if the glass objects show evidence of slightly varying techniques, types and shapes, the virtuosity of the pieces is always clearly apparent. The ivory on the other hand has very divergent styles, which explains the vagueness of the dating. This discrepancy indicates a difference in time or origin. In the first place, there are not enough references to corroborate the statements, and secondly we regrettably have to admit how ignorant we remain regarding Indian antiquity. The earthenware of Begram can be cited as an example; in 1939 Hackin dated it back to the second century AD. In the catalogue that he created during the excavations (Hackin 1954, p. 299), he wrote: 'The discovery of lead glaze in the Hellenistic era generated a new industry, which can be tracked back to the first century BC, mainly in Alexandria, Tarsus (Cilicia) and Gaul, in Saint-Rémy-en-Rollat and in Lezoux.' He therefore considers the earthenware of Begram as an imported product from the first-second century AD (Hackin 1954, p. 12). However, he seems to forget that it shows a remarkable correlation with the style of the ivory statuettes of the river goddesses found in 1937.

The ivory is difficult to date, mainly because the ivory inlaid furniture found in Begram is fairly exceptional. Virtually all the figurines are female; according to Foucher, two plaques evoke scenes from the Buddhist (educational) Jataka tales and there are a few uncommon representations



One of the Fayoum portraits
Berlin-Charlottenburg, Antikenmuseum
Photograph Pierre Cambon

of hunters. The ivory has been very cleverly carved with every technique available, as is the glass, varying from decorative trim reliefs and high relief carvings to intricate engraved ivory. It often makes you think of southern India (Jaggayapeta and Amaravati style, see photo on p. 64). The ivory has been fastened with tiny copper nails to the wooden frame, which is decorated with intricate floral work. It consists of different sized panels on which there is a contrast between empty and full, with openwork motifs. Great care has been taken in the composition and decoration of each panel. In fact, the ivory pieces were considered too beautiful to be very old. This is clear from Stern's dating when he concludes: 'At the earliest, it dates from the last quarter of the first century AD, and at the latest, from the second half of the second century AD, although probably somewhere in between.' He does however admit that the ivory and the Roman portion of the treasure could well stem from different periods. The dating is based on the one hand on one of the findings of the treasure, casket IX (RMN catalogue 2002, p. 117, cat. 37) and its ornamental border, and on the other hand on what he very brilliantly calls

the 'back-bouncing effects' of Begram: to date the ivory, reference material needs to be found in ancient Indian art, but because this does not always correspond, the dating of the artefacts is adjusted to that of the ivory. In other cases, he looks for similarities with the Graeco-Roman culture, for instance for the *grylle*, a monstrous being without a torso. These are then used as the sole criterion for dating, although many questions remain (for example, Kurz (in: Hackin 1954, p. 56) attributes them as 'definitely from the third quarter of the first century AD'). This pretension to accuracy is surprising because of the gaps in our knowledge of Hellenistic art⁶.

As was said by Will, and it is not the smallest paradox of the 1937 discovery, 'the significance of the Begram treasure is at least as important for Graeco-Roman art history as it is for the east-west trade issue.' We must not forget that the blown glass with the *resille* pattern (cat. nos. 158-160) is unique, that the engraved glass with the resting *ephebe* (adolescent male) (inv. no. MG 21 274) kept in the Musée Guimet is the oldest example of this decorative trim technique, and that the enamelled goblets (RMN catalogue 2002, p. 113, cat. 29) are the only ones that have been found up to now, except a piece from the Hans Cohn collection, which presumably came from Egypt (see photo on p. 73). This is why they provide plenty of information regarding painting in the Pompeii era in the eastern Mediterranean⁷. And we did not even breach the subject of the glass with a depiction of the Pharos of Alexandria, still the most reliable and maybe oldest representation of the lighthouse; one of the classic Seven Wonders, and known far and wide at that time (see photo on p. 22).

Another noteworthy fact is the similarity between the Begram emblemata and the Ukrainian emblemata, which can be found at the ancient city of Chersonesus on the Crimea. They appear to have been made for the same purpose, namely as a model for the decoration of the silverware. Perhaps they were used by the 'barbarians'⁸ (see the Bactrian bowls from the Hellenistic period which were found much further east than the Graeco-Roman world, in Russia, Kazakhstan and even Siberia). 'At Chersonesus at the east end of the site', Ellis H. Minns writes (1913, p. 364), 'was made a remarkable finding throwing much light on the way the ancient potter worked: in one room was his kiln perfectly preserved, in another his stock of clay moulds, many broken but about forty more or less whole: from these casts examples were made to let us judge better of his work. These moulds he seems to have made not by independent modelling but by taking impressions from metal, stone or clay. The general style points to the second half of the third century BC, when medallions in high relief were much in fashion for adorning the bottoms of silver vessels and were imitated in clay; several of these moulds, made from emblemata in silver vessels, were intended for producing such imitations. The best of these represents Omphale teaching Heracles to spin: it must have been taken from an earlier original than anything in the collection.' Similar emblemata have also been found in Memphis in Egypt. Furthermore, we must mention the silver emblemata from Sirkap (near Taxila) which consists of the torso of a hairy and bearded man holding a *kantharos* (drinking vessel), perhaps an eastern version of Dionysus, as suggested by Rowland. About the Begram emblemata, Kurz stresses: 'This series forms a virtually unparalleled treasure with regard to composition and Hellenistic motives. Many are known from other objects, but none attain the refined shapes and artistic quality of the Begram reliefs'⁹ (Hackin 1954, p. 110). 'They were regularly used as moulds for

artists or as samples for potential buyers and most likely for both purposes' (Hackin 1954, p. 140). The series show the cycles of Aphrodite and Dionysus, daily scenes, torsos and portraits in profile. In this context, the admiration of Islamic geographers for the beauty of Graeco-Roman art can be mentioned (see photo on p. 74): 'Out of all the nations, the Byzantine human body portrayals are the finest. These artists reproduced the human body at will, whether it was young, adult or old, discontented, comely or kind, laughing or in tears, with a sarcastic or timid smile, giggling, with a gentle smile, an inane grin or experiencing real joy. In short, they recreate the human body, little by little' (Faq 136-137, quotation by André Miquel 2001-2002, vol. 2, p. 464).

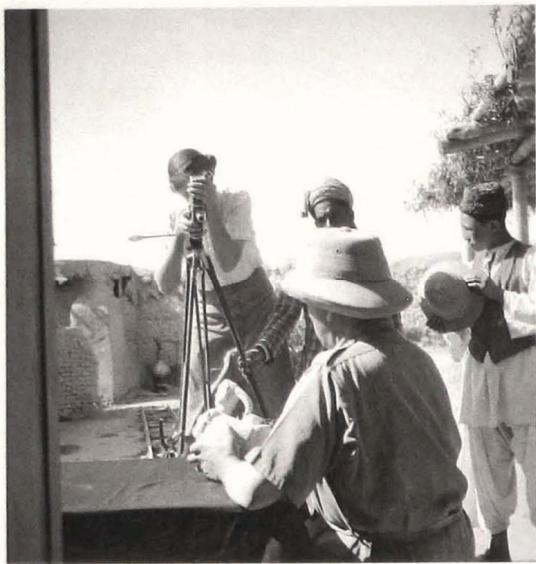
Some have suggested that there could have been local workshops in and around Kabul – which is not impossible, because classical sources, beginning with Herodotus, report that there were Greek settlements in eastern Asia during the Iranian Achaemenid period (sixth-fourth century BC); however, one must remember that all the analyses of glass from Begram show that they are solely classical Roman pieces. Besides, glass as a product can travel far; the Chinese and Korean excavations confirmed this. The report from the Ernest Babelon centre (research centre for archaeological material) states: 'Although the glass ware from Begram displays an important typological diversity, it still belongs to the same chemical family', and then it continues: 'The analysed pieces belong to a well-defined type of glass, namely Roman glassware. The geographical origins can be situated in the Mediterranean area or the Middle East.' The analyses of the painted glassware kept in Paris and Kabul provided identical data. 'Both items are enamelled drinking vessels consisting of sodium glass rich in quartz. The adornment consists of an opaque, vitreous substance which contains antimony, the primary means to

create contrast in classical glass working until the Roman era.' To judge from the themes and motifs, the 'western' pieces would seem to originate in Egypt (this for instance is the reason why the Egyptian goddess Isis appears on some of the enamelled glass). And it is also confirmed by the porphyry vase, because the Romans could only find this type of stone in Egypt. As well as the depiction of Harpocrates, the child Horus (cat. no. 225), the bronze statue of Heracles-Serapis illustrates how much this Roman Empire province combined different styles. The theme also returns on a terracotta artefact which was excavated in Khotan (now Xinjiang, western China) and which can now be found in the National Museum of Korea. According to Pliny and the *Periplus Maris Erythraei* (chronicles of the Erythraean (Red) Sea), Alexandria was the harbour in the Middle East for trade with India. Despite the 'Parthian restrictions' the treasure of Begram proves that an effective contact between East and West continued to exist due to the coasting trade in the Indian Ocean. At that time, relations between Rome and the Iranian Empire of the Parthians were extremely strained; the defeat of the consul Crassus during the battle of Carrhae in 53 BC brought Roman expansion in the Middle East to an end. Islamic geographers too, considered this channel as a major trade route on which Indian imports occurred on a regular basis, 'dinars from the Sindh Empire and corals and emeralds from Egypt' (Miquel 2001-2002, vol. 2, p. 123, no. 3). Since there are similarities with the discoveries in Sirkap, the treasure of Begram demonstrates the exchanges between Alexandria, Taxila and Begram, whilst the excavations by Marshall indicate that there were interactions with Tillya-tepe too. The small bronze Harpocrates from Begram is related to an example found in Taxila; the golden statuette of Aphrodite that was found in Sirkap reminds us of the Aphrodite statue from Tillya-tepe.



Bharhut, vedika pillar,
Sunga period, 1st century AD
Calcutta, Indian Museum
Photograph Musée Guimet

Begram, 1937, detail from casket IX
National Museum of Afghanistan
Photograph Musée Guimet, DAFA fund



Begram, 1939, Joseph and Ria Hackin
Photograph Musée Guimet, DAFA fund

Chronological issues

To be brief, the composition of the treasure of Begram sheds some light on a number of issues, although much remains unclear. This also applies to the chronology. As mentioned previously: some archaeologists situate all the findings in the first-second century AD, whilst others claim that the ivory and painted glass date from much later, in the third and sometimes fourth century AD. However, not many claim it originated prior to the first century AD. Only the plaster emblemata (Adriani 1955) and the ivory are thought by some to date from before the beginning of our era. In 1970¹⁰ Davidson questioned Stern's arguments regarding his dating of the treasure to the third century AD. He underscores the profane character of the ivory pieces, which demonstrate an intimacy that is not fitting with religious (Buddhist) art; the enormous diversity in styles and the more convincing kinship with the Amaravati style (which flourished roughly between the second century BC and the first century AD), than with the Mathura style from the Kushan period (from the first century AD onwards). In fact, the ivory suggests the existence of a court art, a painting tradition of which some fragments subsist in Ajanta, cave X, dated in the first century BC. After close inspection, these reservations appear to be appropriate. The famous puffed-up chignon hairstyle is treated differently in Mathura than in Begram. Although wreaths with animal motifs are known from Roman art, they are also present in Indian art (for instance the stele of Mihintale at the Kantaka stupa, considered the oldest Buddhist monument in Sri Lanka). Some details from Begram indicate similarities with pieces from the first century BC, for instance the bands with flower motifs, in which the rosettes overlap each other each time; and the *torana* (free-standing ceremonial Indian gateway), which is not from much later than the original model in Bharhut. Davidson also bases his case on earthenware shaped like a bird-woman wearing a bangle decorated with a three-leaved motif. He believes that this type of ornament disappeared some time around 50 BC, although it was

extremely widespread in earlier times. Following his own logic, Davidson dates the Begram ivory to somewhere between 75 and 25 BC. He may have gone too far, but it had the advantage that the discussion returned to the right course, because constantly comparing Kushana (Mathura) and Begram since the beginning of the excavations distorted reality. Mathura should not be considered as the obvious benchmark. An additional illustration is the connection with the Bactrian hair comb pieces from the Kushan era excavated back in the 1970s, first in Dalverzin-tepe and then in Tillya-tepe. These show shared and virtually identical styles, comparable to the decoration on casket X from Begram: both linear, the same type of engraving, figures with a pointed nose, elongated eyes and an oval shaped neck. The Tillya-tepe example was lying beside a silver Parthian coin (first century BC) and a gold coin from the Emperor Tiberius era (14-37 AD).

The treasure of Begram, according to Rowland 'one of the greatest treasures in the history of Asian Archaeology' (Rowland 1966) causes confusion because of its profusion and unfathomable variety. According to this American scientist, this treasure which was discovered 'in Kanishka's palace complex that apparently had been walled up, presumably at the approach of a dangerous invader', seems to stand outside of any context. Rowland rightly dismisses the theory of protection against the approaching invasion of 241 AD through logical reasoning. If the western and Chinese objects were from the early first century (or a little earlier) and if the ivory were from the second century (or older, see Davidson 1972),



'Barbarian' head, Butkara I, Swat
Rome, Museo Nazionale d'Arte Orientale
Photograph Musée Guimet

then it would be very odd if at least one hundred years later a secret store was created; whether it was a royal collection or commercial goods is not relevant. Rowland suggests the possibility that the treasure was hidden due to an internal succession problem during the Huviska era (126-164 AD, successor of Kanishka), in light of the 'barbarisation' of the coins minted in his period.

Dating the ivory remains the most difficult part for Rowland, since he believes that the divergent styles imply different periods ('The Early Andhra School of sculpture', second-first century BC, and 'The Mathura style of the second century AD'), although he also mentions that there are insufficient similarities with Indian art. The smooth lines and the surprisingly animated style of the ivory are far more sophisticated than the more archaic nature of the sculpture of the same period, at least when compared to the statues we are familiar with. There are for instance no similarities between the sensuality of the Begram silhouettes and Yakshi (goddesses) figures from Mathura. Rowland believes this indicates a difference in levels between artisans, depending on the technique used: 'One wonders if, even as late as the second century AD, the really great masters worked on ivory – and the stone carvers were still striving to approximate the refinement of their technique.' Such a big difference in artistic levels is indeed remarkable. This could be explained by a difference in environment and clientele rather than by a difference in equipment. However, this once again reveals how awfully ignorant we are regarding Indian aesthetics during the pre-Gupta era (circa 320-540): depending on whether Indian art is considered according to the ivory found in Begram, or according to the statues found in Mathura, perspectives are very dissimilar. Whoever looks at the famous casket IX will notice that the carvings are no less exceptional than the most beautiful paintings in the Ajanta rock temples (western India), which are supposed to date from much later, not only because of the animation and space, but also on account of the depictions of extremely graceful and provocative female figures. This rather puts into perspective the notion of Gupta art as the apex of Indian antiquity.

The ivory from Begram is striking as a result of its freshness, inventiveness and diversity; it reveals the work of a master's hand. The griffins accentuated with red or black seem to move in a nearly abstract way. However, casket IX also demonstrates a candid naturalism; the cow lifting its leg, the lion full of pride and the elephant wandering by. The ducklings on casket I are also fairly realistic, even if humour and fantasy have not been omitted. The adornments consist of a mixture of Indian themes, such as the Vase of Abundance, the *gana* (attendant of Shiva) who carries the sling, and motifs from Iranian culture and even the Middle East, for instance monsters with human heads that resemble Gorgons, the Greek mythological monsters. With regard to style, some of the engraved figures are similar to the ivory pieces found in Sirkap in the Indo-Parthian strata. Others have a completely different style, with sleek and unexpectedly tall silhouettes, while several others have shorter and bulkier shapes. There is also a contrast between, on the one hand, very comely young girls, represented by the artist with astonishing grace and a feeling for fine distinctions, and on the other hand the female figures which are completely and openly relaxing without any sense of modesty in their nudity. Female couples with round faces and opulent forms, entwined voluptuously, alongside a graceful lady getting dressed and combing her hair or hairpiece. This astonishing diversity in style and aesthetics even appears on a single piece of furniture (see for instance



Female figurine, marble, Treasure house of Nisa, 250 BC
Photograph Musée Guimet

the back of the chair). The ivory shows an exuberance and imagination which could never have been suggested by the stone sculptures: the weeping willow evokes a landscape, the charming nonchalance with which the cat lies in wait for the bird reminds us of daily scenes. Some pieces are true paintings, for instance casket X, on which a lively village meeting appears to occur. Besides these daily scenes with simple details, there are also adornments with a *makara* (type of crocodile), which is in fact rather typical for the Indian art of that period. Nevertheless, there seems to be a consistency in the decoration of these different objects which hints at a single context.

Mehendale (1997) opts for the consistency perspective and plumps for a date somewhere in the first century AD. But his line of reasoning is sometimes a little weak. For instance 'the absence of any iconic Buddhist representation' is used as a justification on p. 215. This shows that as soon as the debate involves the East, the treasure of Begram is confronted with two problems: that there is virtually no reference material in India and that Gandhara chronology is an extremely unstable area.

The bronze cauldron kept at the Musée Guimet is a good example (MG 21 193). It is typical for the Mediterranean area (it is fairly similar to Portuguese olive oil jugs). The cauldron bears an inscription in kharoshthi which was deciphered by Gérard Fussman in 1990 ('This object comes from Sagadea'), and based on the characteristic features of the script, it is believed by him to date from the Kanishka reign". For a long time, Kanishka's reign was thought to have occurred between 78 and 144 AD, but based on the Rabatak inscription found later, some believe that this period can be reduced to around 100-120 AD. In fact, many scholars use the treasure of Begram as the foundation for a specific view of early Indian art, more particularly Gandharan art, because the treasure is often associated with the Kushan Empire (with Kanishka as the most prominent emperor). Ghirshman for instance assumed that he could establish the origin and character of the whole of Gandharan art from the treasure of Begram, as he believed it did not derive from the Kushana, Indians or Parthians. 'Gandharan art mainly originates from the art known in the eastern Roman Empire; the Kushana became familiar with it through the flourishing trade during the second half of the first century AD, and this trade reached its zenith during the second century AD' (see: Deydier 1950, p. 15). 'This art form, which was adopted by local artists and reproduced in numerous pieces, became progressively more removed from the western prototypes in favour of the national sources, and under the Gupta dynasty it once again developed into a typical Indian art form.' He considers the Corinthian capitals or column tops with Buddhas from Gandharan art to be an excellent illustration (according to him, not older than the first thirty years of the third century AD). These capitals showed Gandharan art at its peak even though the simplified version of them was found at the Surkh Kotal excavations. However, a small bronze column was also excavated in Begram and can now be found in the National Museum of Afghanistan. It differs so much from the Corinthian prototype that it could be considered a forerunner of the Surkh Kotal columns. A replica of the same type was found in Pompeii. So Begram may well illustrate the evolution of Gandharan art.

A final interesting interpretation of the ivory from Begram arises when it is compared with the ivory from Nisa. These items – with highly developed Graeco-Iranian aesthetics and a refined style – date from the Parthian era (250 BC), thus much earlier than the Kushana. Consequently, dating the treasure of Begram to Kanishka's reign becomes a reconstruction rather than a verified fact, forgetting that already a tradition exists in the field of ivory, connected to Bactria and India. Two symbols from Afghan archaeology are handily conflated without any clarification why art under a simple 'Scythian chieftain', as Hackin called him, would suddenly turn to Indian and Graeco-Roman art. Amazingly, there actually already existed a scenario with a justification for this, to be precise, what Marshall hypothesised long before the discovery of the treasure of Begram: the occupation of the Kabul river valley by King Gondophares (Marshall 1912-1913), who would have brought his own Indian and Greek influences. This scenario was unambiguous and coherent and also explained the concurrence of the findings in Sirkap and Begram. However, this explanation did not receive enough attention; as was said by the French statesman Clemenceau (in a totally different context), 'war is much too serious a matter to be entrusted to the experts.'

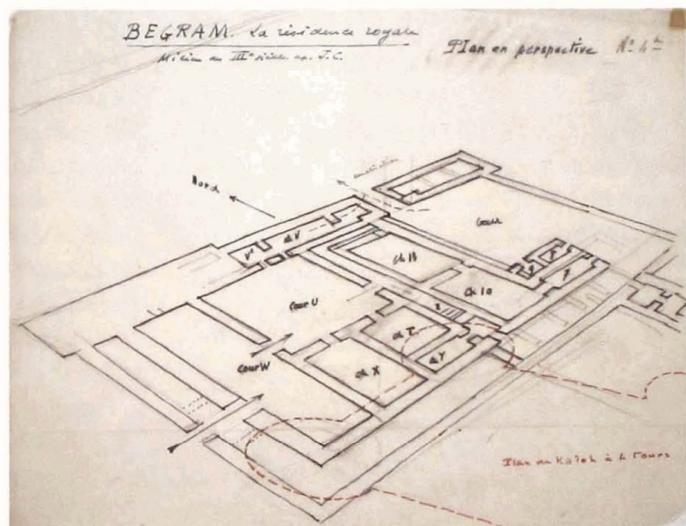
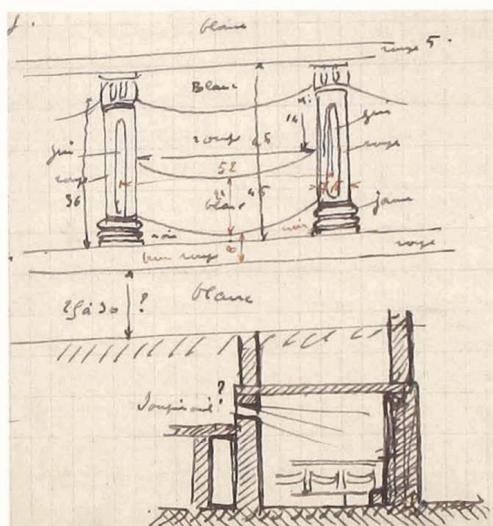
In fact, the treasure of Begram is situated at a crossroads, as much regarding time as space; it sits right in the middle of the Kushana (Indian), the Graeco-Roman and the Parthian conjectures. In each case,

an image is given of a world where ideas and shapes travelled a lot, despite borders, hazards and wars.

The building where the treasure was found

Next, we still have the building to consider. Strangely enough, only two out of all the aerial photographs of the excavations (probably taken by Carl) have been published: an overview photo by Ghirshman and an enlarged detail in an article from Hamelin regarding the glass of Begram (Hamelin 1953-1954, vol. IV, pl. XV). These photos can now be found in the archives of the Musée Guimet. Hamelin uses this detail as proof for the ground plans of excavation project II. On these ground plans, he attempts to reproduce the original shape of the building where the treasure was found, just beyond the Qal'ah with the four turrets (Hamelin 1953-1954, vol. III, pl. I). It is also strange that the photographs of the wall paintings in chamber 13 have never been published, nor have the photos of the coins found during excavation project I. Bopearachchi only listed the coins kept in Paris in a catalogue in the 1990s. However, from the beginning, there was a sketch of the underlying layers of chamber 13, although it was not entirely coherent. Hackin published this in a coin catalogue (Hackin 1954, p. 309).

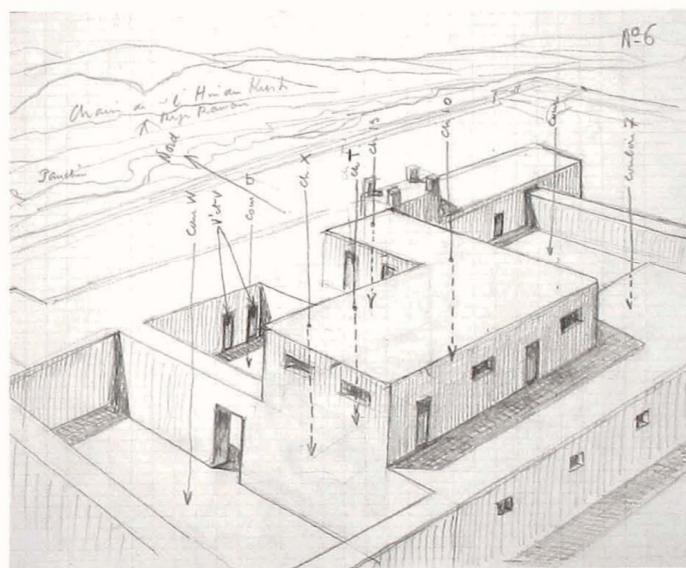
Hamelin suggests in a reconstruction (1953-1954, vol. III, pl. I) that the building where the treasure was found extends further to the west, past the Qal'ah with the four turrets. He believes that the treasure chamber must have had an upper floor, because of the double walls that he considers to be support walls. 'Based on the very accurate ground plans of Le Berre, we have outlined all the buildings of the royal palace of Begram. A large rectangular wall with a succession of small chambers and corridors surrounded the main building situated in the middle; this was designed as an L-shaped building oriented to the north-west; we believe that an upper floor was built on this main building. [...] At the back of the inner court there was a door which gave access to corridor E, which led to chamber 13 via a detour, and then to chamber 10 [...]. The double walls would have served to hide the walled-up doors, but we believe they were used as a support for the upper floor¹².' Hamelin adds: 'We have not found any traces at all of charred wood, thus the idea of destruction by fire can be ruled out. [...] And now that we are discussing architecture, attention needs to be drawn to the fact that the walls of chambers 10 and 13 were plastered and covered with paintings. Light-green paint residues have been found in chamber 10, and wainscoting decorated with drapery suspended from small columns in chamber 13, in terracotta-brown, grey, white and black (see the sketch from Carl).' Perhaps a building with a similar shape as the excavated treasure building from Ai Khanum can be distinguished in these ground plans. Rapin's references are based on the notes from Le Berre, although he does not mention the essays from Hamelin (Rapin 1992, p. 385): 'Although the archaeologists never mention the relics, the likelihood of an earlier building in the middlemost and eastern parts of the "palace" is corroborated in several places, both by the coping which can be seen in the floor and doorsills, and by the use of square clay bricks which are typical of Hellenistic architecture in Central Asia, and which were found during the excavations of the small shops on the north side of the "palace". [...] The ground plans of this earlier building, however, can only be reconstructed partially [...]. Based on the ground plans of the remains in the northwest of the middle part of the "palace" and the remarkably thick walls in the elevation, a rectangular building can be reconstructed with walls of at least 1.90 to 2 m thick.'



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Begram, 1939, chamber 13, Wall paintings,
Adornments on small pillars
Photograph Musée Guimet, DAFA fund

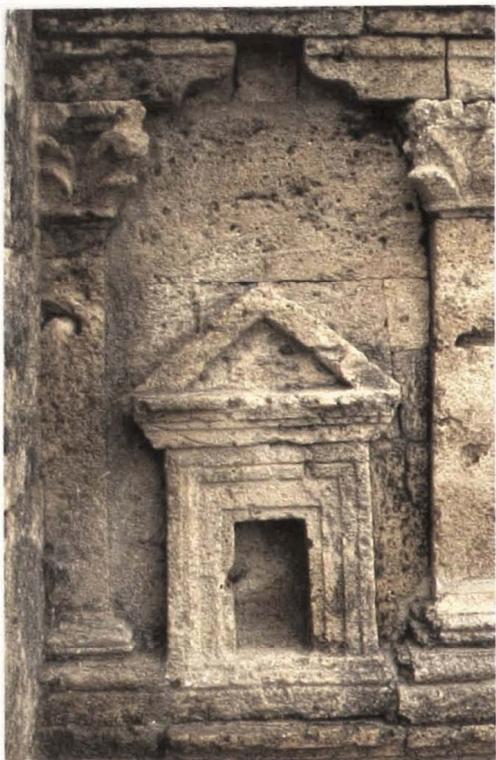
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Begram, 1939, chamber 13, Wall paintings, detail
Photograph Musée Guimet, DAFA fund

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Begram, 1939, chamber 13, Wall painting
Sketch by Pierre Hamelin
(based on a drawing by Jean Carl)
Photograph Musée Guimet, DAFA fund



Begram, building where the treasure was found,
Ground plan by Pierre Hamelin
Photograph Musée Guimet

Begram, building where the treasure was found,
Reconstruction by Pierre Hamelin
Photograph Musée Guimet



Taxila, Sirkap, block F, Underside of a stupa, detail,
1st century BC
Photograph Pierre Cambon

depict a Jataka tale, one gold coin from Tillya-tepe clearly refers to the Three Jewels of Buddhism (Buddha, Dharma and Sangha), and Buddhist stupas have been unearthed in Sirkap. Smith believes that these stupas were inspired by Hellenistic examples much older than the Buddhist Gandharan art (dating back to the famous Scythian-Parthian period); this can be perceived in block F constructed on an elevation decorated on the front side with a Greek door, an Indian arch and a *torana* (gate), with the two-headed eagle motif on each of these elements. The three excavations reveal an unexpected convergence between India and the Graeco-Roman civilisation, at the time when its limits were on the Black Sea coast, and also with Egypt when Alexandria was its capital city. Like Tillya-tepe with the Chinese mirrors, Begram extends the reach of its contacts throughout the whole of Eurasia, especially with the lacquer ware from the Han Dynasty period. And although, just like in Tillya-tepe, Buddhism in Begram was merely incidental, it was still very much present. In both cases it harks back to relatively old and sometimes unexpected models. The Jataka tales are rather unusual in Gandharan art, but the few illustrations of them are increasingly humanised with time; the examples in Begram are already fairly humanised. On one side of the gold coins found in Tillya-tepe there is a lion, often the symbol for Buddha, and on the reverse side there is a naked hero depicted as Heracles. These cases reveal a world in which extremely dissimilar traditions cohabit next to each other, although they still have visual and aesthetic similarities. All this is far removed from the standard Graeco-Buddhist art from the Kushan period which is often compared with the late Roman Empire. The entirety is very similar to the oldest Gandharan reliefs inspired by

This building would be positioned around a large square space, possibly an inner court. Along the northern, western and southern sides there was a narrow corridor. Because of the strict symmetry and the rectangular shape which stands out against the “palace” from the Kushan era, one wonders if this earlier building did not belong to a Hellenistic building style, which could be similar to the Ai Khanum style.¹ In 1937 however, Hackin compares the masonry of the treasure chambers with the architecture of Taxila (Hackin 1939, pp. 7, 9), where he refers to Marshall (1936, pl. V): a strong connection in the masonry work, which could point towards Scythian-Parthian layers, according to Marshall.

Conclusion

The discoveries made in Begram, Sirkap and Tillya-tepe display a shared link. Obviously, in the first case there is a treasure, in the second case there are relics of a city, and in the third case there is a ‘barbarian’ necropolis. However, all three excavations indicate the same fascination with the Graeco-Roman civilisation, the importance of Roman traditions from the early Christian era and the Hellenistic influence, which seems to be directly connected with the cities of Chersonesus and Alexandria. The three excavations also show Indian influences, and the fact that the ivory artefacts from Begram and Tillya-tepe appear to be identical indicate that they originate in the same period. Despite their strongly profane nature, these findings also show the role of Buddhism although in a subordinate way: according to Alfred Fouche, two ivory pieces from Begram



Hadda, ‘spirit with flowers’, Tepe Kalan, TK 142
MNA-Guimet, MG 17190
Photograph Thierry Ollivier

Hellenistic examples which, according to Rowland, date back to the Antonian period (96-192 AD), when Greek tradition flourished for a second time. These reliefs suggest a remarkable connection with classical references. Begram, Sirkap and Tillya-tepe had demonstrable contact with each other around the beginning of our era, which could be a sign that they had developed a common artistic tradition in earlier times.

This may have come from the ivory found two hundred years earlier in the Arsacidian capital Nisa. Ghirshman connects the ivory, which shows a true eastern Hellenistic character, to Graeco-Bactrian art. Moreover, nearly two hundred years later, Hellenism was still thriving, despite (or maybe as a result of) the Parthian obstacle. The Parthian king Orodes II, for instance, was at a performance of Euripides's *The Bacchae* when he learned about the defeat of Crassus (53 BC). In any case, during the Roman Empire, the Parthians were evaded by the trade on the Indian Ocean. Begram, Sirkap and Tillya-tepe had an amazingly coherent network, with vital commercial relations over the sea and on land.

The three excavations point to an Iranian culture with strong Hellenistic and Indian traditions. On this culture, the Kushan Empire was built, which was more receptive to Hellenistic influences than to the dominant Iranian culture; it also embraced Indian and Chinese influences. As highlighted by Foucher (1942), this Indo-Afghan world had a distinctive nature. It was an extensive region on the border between India and Iran, with access to the steppes, and a surprisingly deep-rooted Greek cultural tradition. In this world, art prospered, sometimes a little on the clumsy side, but growing stronger every day and developing into the flourishing Gandharan art forms. When we look at the Begram, Sirkap and Tillya-tepe excavations and consider the underlying cohesion, we must reassess Hackin's chronology made after the Begram excavation and which was formalised by Stern. Their theory that the treasure of Begram unquestionably derives from the Kushan period is no longer accurate. Their evidence is rather implausible too. The puffed-up chignon hairstyle mentioned by Stern already existed in Rome in the first century BC, as confirmed by the bust of Livia that can be found in the Louvre. Stern starts his explanation by emphasising the hypothetical nature of his arguments and Hackin's arguments are no more convincing than Stern's. The coin from Kanishka found in chamber 10 in 1937 is insufficient proof to situate the whole of the treasure in the Kanishka reign, because coins often sink to lower layers. Connecting the treasure of Begram to Sirkap and Tillya-tepe means that it would date back before the Kushan era. This would overturn the prevailing view of antique Indian art. And this would also mean that the reign of Hermaeus, associated with the creation of the treasure, would have to be dated differently. But this is a question of coins¹³.



Hermaeus, an enigmatic king

Narain (1957, p. 159) summarises the discussion regarding Hermaeus as follows: 'The coins on which the names of Hermaeus and the Kushan king Kujula Kadphises are found in association have long been adduced as evidence in any discussion on the chronology of this period and the date of Hermaeus. It was first supposed that they were actually joint-issues and that Hermaeus was immediately succeeded by Kujula Kadphises [...]. But, long ago, F.W. Thomas suggested that there was an intermediate period between Hermaeus and Kujula Kadphises during which the Pahlavas were in the possession of Kabul [...]. This led Rapson to give up his own view and to accept that of Thomas as almost certainly

correct. Since then this has been the general opinion of scholars [...]. Even Konow, who was at one time inclined to think that coins indicate an alliance between Hermaeus and Kujula Kadphises some time after 25 AD, abandoned this untenable theory later. The earlier theory, which has been generally given up, has been revived by Lohuizen-de Leeuw [...], the only difference being that, instead of dating Hermaeus late, she has put back the date of Kujula. But Lohuizen's chronological scheme is closely connected with her theory of one era of 129 BC, which, as we have shown elsewhere, is not acceptable – cf. Ghirshman [...] who in order to make Hermaeus the immediate predecessor of Kujula Kadphises, postulates a very late date for him.'

In his personal theory, Narain calls Azes I the 'Parthian' conqueror of the last 'Greek kingdom': 'It is likely, therefore, that Azes (73-50 BC) took Upper Arachosia from Hermaeus (75-55 BC), confining the latter to the Paropamisadae. Instead of attacking Hermaeus in the Paropamisadae, where he may have been strong, Azes I first took Gandhara (at the end of Hippostratus's reign in c. 70 BC). Holding Ghazni in the south and Gandhara in the east, Azes I could then easily take the Paropamisadae by a pincer movement. In the north, Hermaeus had probably already lost his isolated enclaves to the Yueh-chih, and thus we may imagine his kingdom in the Kaboul valley as a forlorn island amidst the surrounding deluge of hostile powers. Thus Hermaeus was the last Indo-Greek king. With the end of his reign, ended the story of 200 years in which there reigned 39 kings and 2 queens [...]' Narain attempts to accurately define



Brooch in chased gold Taxila, Sirkap, 1st century BC
Karachi, National Museum of Pakistan
Photograph Musée Guimet



Begram, 1937, bronze weight
Photograph Musée Guimet, DAFA fund

the date of the fall of the Greeks by using the coins: 'The coins of Azes are not as common and plentiful in the Kaboul valley as they are in Arachosia (including Ghazni) and in Gandhara (including Taxila). This indicates that Azes I did not rule in the Paropamisadae for the same long period, as he did in Arachosia and Gandhara. We may therefore suppose that Azes I conquered the Paropamisadae only after the death of Hermaeus in c. 55, and during the last years of his own reign, which probably did not end before c. 50 BC [...]'.

To Widemann, the chronology is rather simple: 'Kapisi was conquered c. 20 AD, from an Indo-Greek king named Hermaeus, by the Indo-Parthian king Gondophares, who had recently unified the Indo-Parthian kingdom of Seistan-Arachosia with Azes II's kingdom, probably after the death of this last Saka king of Panjab and Gandhara. Some years later, the Kushan leader Kozoolo Kadphises unified the Yuezhi under his authority, took back Kapisi from the Indo-Parthians and began the conquest of North-Western India.' His argumentation is based on several elements: 1. A coin with the head of Hermaeus which was re-minted with the head of Gondophares, and another one with Gondophares which was in its turn re-minted with Kujula Kadphises (Widemann 1972); 2. 'There is no evidence for a Yuezhi invasion in 70 BC' (hypothesis in Dobbins 1970, p. 238). Dobbins believes that the countless coins of Hermaeus, which were minted over a period of one century, are nothing else but imitations made by the Yuezhi.

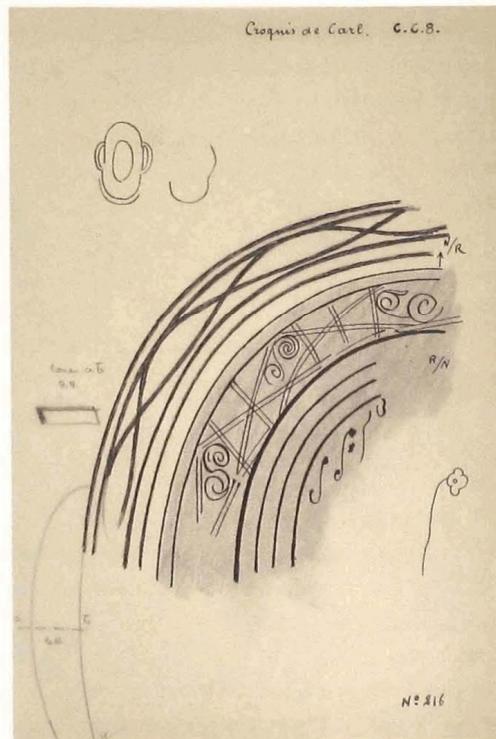
There could also in fact have been more than one king named Hermaeus; nowhere does it say that there was only one. Furthermore, nothing clarifies why Kujula Kadphises never took the title of Basileus in the Greek inscriptions on his coins, and nothing explains why the Greek and Iranian titles were only placed on the Kushan coins when his son and heir Vima Taktu came into power. And in that case the transition to the Iranian

tradition occurred later than generally believed. 'This formal end of the Indo-Greek kings thus took place only at the end of the reign of Kozoolo Kadphises (c. 60-70 AD).'

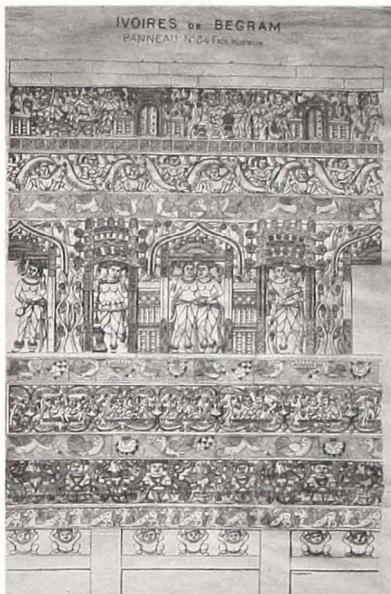
Thus it seems that the conversion from Greek to Kushan (Yuezhi) was a gradual occurrence. 'The progressive assimilation of Greek culture by the Kushana allowed them to keep Greek as an official language for almost a century until Kanishka decided, on the first year of his reign, c. 120 AD, to use the Bactrian language written with a Greek alphabet.' To accentuate this reasoning, Widemann uses the Chinese chronicle *Hou Hanshu* (The Book of Later Han), although he interpreted it to his advantage, something Narain had also done earlier.

Hou Hanshu, the 'Chinese evidence'

'At first, the Yuezhi were conquered by the Xiongnu, who then relocated to Daxia; they split this kingdom into Xumi, Shuangmi, Guishuang, Xiaodun and Dumi; all five realms were governed by a Xihou. More than one hundred years later, the Guishuang Xihou, Qiujiuque, attacked the other four nations and destroyed their empire. He proclaimed himself king and named his kingdom Guishuang. He then invaded the Anxi Empire and subjugated the Gaofu area. He also destroyed the Puda and Jibin kingdoms and had these completely in his power. Qiujiuque died when he was well into his eighties. His son Yangaozhen succeeded him. Yangaozhen invaded India and had one of his generals run the nation. Since then, the Yuezhi have been exceedingly rich and flourishing. All other countries called this empire Guishuang; the Han called it the Great Yuezhi Kingdom due to its former name' (Hou Hanshu LXXXVIII, 2920-2921, pp. 492-493¹⁴). A little further in the text it appears that the Gaofu



Begram, 1939, Chinese lacquer ware, sketch by Jean Carl
Photograph Musée Guimet



Bagram, 1939, complex 34,
Reconstruction by Pierre Hamelin
Photograph Musée Guimet

Part of a crown, Paekche kingdom,
Tomb of king Muryong
Seoul, National Museum of Korea
Photograph Musée Guimet



area is situated in Afghanistan. 'The Gaofu realm is situated at the south west of the Great Yuezhi and covers an extensive area. The manners and customs are identical to Indian ones, but the Gaofu inhabitants are weak and easy to enslave. They excel in commerce and their fortune is immense. Several rulers subdued Gaofu: three countries, India, Jibin and Anxi, were successively powerful enough to subjugate the area, but once they weakened, they lost it again. Gaofu had never before been conquered by the Yuezhi. The *Hanshu* categorises it with the five Xihou, but this is not in keeping with reality. The last conqueror was the Anxi kingdom. Yuezhi domination over Gaofu began when they conquered Anxi' (*op. cit.* 2921, p. 520).

Anxi can be equated with the Indo-Parthians; it is most likely that the Chinese chronicles more or less deliberately failed to distinguish the facts about Parthia, the true Iran, from the Indo-Parthians, which is not surprising in itself, considering the distance to China. The term Jibin seems to relate to the (Indo-)Scythians. The only region that was successively conquered by India, the (Indo-)Scythians and the Parthians corresponds to the Afghan territory south of the Hindu Kush, the area around Kabul. 'Gaofu' resembles 'Kaboura', used by Greek geographers to designate 'Kabul'. According to Widemann, this denomination is the evidence that the Yuezhi (Kushana) conquered the Kabul river valley later than first thought, and after the Parthians.

Kapisa, the last Hellenistic kingdom, and its conquest by the Indo-Parthians

The culture of Bagram can be summed up as follows: Indo-Greek (Hermaeus) or Parthian, but not Greek or Kushan. The Greeks were gone long before the Kushan period. The Kushana came much later and nothing truly supports the theory that Kujula Kadphises arrived via the Hindu Kush in 30 AD (see the *Hou Hanshu*). If we accept it as true that Hermaeus ruled until the beginning of our era (Marshall), the treasure of Bagram originated during the reign of Hermaeus (Indo-Greek). But if we believe that Hermaeus fell in 70 BC because of the Indo-Scythian nomads' advance (Bopearachchi), the treasure has to have originated during the Parthian period. In the first case, the Indo-Greeks are the link between Tillya-tepe in the north and Sirkap in the south; in the second case, an Indo-Parthian presence would have spread from the Hindu Kush in the north to Taxila in the south. This group is believed to have been in contact with the Parthian Empire (Iran) on the one hand – and thus with the Roman Empire –, and on the other hand with the Scythian realm (Tillya-tepe), and as a result, with the Chersonesus and Graeco-Scythian settlements on the Bosphorus banks too. Both datings appear more logical than a treasure from the time of the Kushan kings, who, according to their coins, still lived as nomads in Central Asia and who were rather primitive (Foucher describes them as 'Tartars'). Thus the Roman association (Alexandria and the Persian Gulf) and the profound Hellenistic Scythian relationship can be explained without being too inconsistent. This also brings more credibility to the Christian myth that Gondophares was one of the Three Wise Men from the East (De la Vallée Poussin 1930, p. 278) and to the legendary travels of St Thomas to India (which previously appeared impossible because of the 'Parthian boundary' in Iran). The treasure of Bagram shows obvious similarities with the findings in Sirkap, dated by Marshall (1951) to the first century AD based on the bronze statuette of Harpocrates (an identical statuette was also found in the treasure of Bagram)¹⁵. The treasure also shows similarities with the Tillya-tepe excavations (for instance, the ivory comb, the construction of

which much resembles that of casket X from Begram). Based on the Chinese mirrors from the Han Dynasty and coins dating back to the reign of the Roman Emperor Tiberius (14-37 AD), Tillya-tepe dates from the beginning of our era. A link between Tillya-tepe and Sirkap is easily found too, for example in the Tillya-tepe Aphrodite and the one found in Taxila, in the Greek city of Sirkap, stratum II, Saka-Pahlava period. Consequently, placing Begram in the Kushan dynasty is more a matter of belief and assumptions rather than being based on reality, particularly because the Chinese Hou Hanshu does not provide any indication whatsoever to date the creation of the Kushan Empire before 30-35 AD. When comparing Begram and Tillya-tepe, even more similarities appear. Obviously the context is different, but the gadrooned golden goblet

found in grave IV in Tillya-tepe is quite similar to the blue glass beakers from Begram, the shapes of which were inspired by metallic objects. The chalice from Tillya-tepe has a Greek inscription, just like a number of glass pieces from Begram. The plaster emblemata with the Heracles representation found in Begram have the same ideography as the enigmatic representation of a man on a wheel on the golden coin from Tillya-tepe. This representation seems to refer to the Vajrapani theme, which symbolises the power of the Buddhist doctrine and tuition in Gandharan art. The treasure of Tillya-tepe is awash with Hellenistic themes with Indian influences (the other way round too, for that matter), and this is very similar for the treasure of Begram.

Notes

- 1 This manuscript is kept in the Musée Guimet in Paris and has never been published before, except for some excerpts in the *Journal of The Asiatic Society of Bengal: The Topes of Manikyala* published in 1834 and *Conjectures on the march of Alexander* published in 1836.
- 2 The period of Hermaeus's reign is still controversial: 90-70 BC according to Osmund Bopearachchi, 75-55 BC according to A. K. Narain, and according to Marshall it was even later (Marshall 1912-1913, p. 7).
- 3 This is why there are some errors in the publications. For instance Hackin states that chamber 10, excavation project II, was a burial place found at 1.60 m of depth, which is not as deep as the actual level of the chamber (Hackin 1939, vol. text, p. 54, no. 254 (108)). The corpse is buried with a complete set of iron utensils, a photo appeared in Hackin – Carl – Meunié 1959 (fig. 233). These objects must have actually come from project I, the Bazaar excavations. However, due to an unpublished photo album of the excavations (Musée Guimet archive) the error could be rectified.
- 4 Otto Kurz wrote about the emblemata: 'The originals of these remarkable plaster casts discovered in Begram date back to the 1st century, maybe a little earlier, but certainly not later' (in: Hackin 1954, p. 145). Regarding the lacquer ware, Vadime Elisséeff stated: 'These pieces can be dated to between 40 and 50 AD' (in: Hackin 1954, p. 155).
- 5 'When the ascendancy among the nomads had passed from the Saka to a Pahlava or Parthian dynasty with Azes I.' Woodcock 1966, pp. 125-127.
- 6 Schlumberger 1960, p. 311: 'We do not fully appreciate that the Mediterranean art from the Roman Imperial period is much better known than that from the Hellenistic period, of which it is a direct descendant.'
- 7 See Charbonneau 1970, pp. 159-161: 'Perhaps the most perfect expression of the new ruling classes, the main driving force of the cities and of the Hellenistic monarchies, the bourgeoisie who created an artificial hill with trees in the city centre in honour of Pan and who built countless baroque pavilions, shrines and rockery gardens in the outskirts of Alexandria, could well be a drinking goblet of painted glass which was found in the Afghan Begram, but originates in Alexandria.' This goblet with a depiction of the abduction of the goddess Europa is kept in the Musée Guimet (MG 21 228).

- 8 Cf. catalogue Paris 2001, p. 97, fig. 12, Babyna Mobyla excavations.
- 9 In his report on Hackin 1954, Rowland makes a direct connection with the Buddhist Kingdom of Gandhara from the same era: 'It appears to the present writer that there is the strongest connection between the Begram medallion with the bust of a poet and the stucco heads of an Augustan style found at Sirkap in Taxila, as well as the so-called "Antinous" of Hadda.'
- 10 Edited two years later, see Davidson 1972 in the bibliography.
- 11 Gérard Fussman, 22 February 1990
- 12 See the remarks from Meunié in his excavation report from 1946 (in: Hackin – Carl – Meunié 1959, p. 111): 'It is noteworthy that many dwellings and chambers have no doors. This was the same in Taxila, in the dwellings at Sirkap and Sirkap. Based on the story of Apollonius regarding his visit to Taxila in 50 AD, Sir John Marshall believes that these chambers without doors were accessible from the upstairs chambers.'
- 13 'The large and widespread coinage of Hermaeus attests a substantial kingdom. [...] It is generally agreed that he ruled over the whole of the Paropamisadae, that he still commanded some influence in isolated enclaves north of the Hindu Kush, at least in the beginning of his reign. [...] The remarkable treasure of Mir Zakah near Ghazni contained about 1000 coins of Hermaeus and there is no doubt, therefore, that he ruled in Upper Arachosia contiguous to the Kaboul valley. [...] It is also likely that before Hippostratus was overthrown by Azes I in Gandhara, he had entered into some alliance with Hermaeus against the common danger to which ultimately they succumbed. [...] Rapson's view that the coins of Hermaeus extended over a long period has generally been accepted and Bachhofer admits that the portraits of Hermaeus "permit one to follow him from youth to old age", though they gradually lost in quality.' It is fair to assume a reign of at least twenty years for him; his rule must have ended, therefore, in c. 55 BC' (Narain 1957, p. 162).
- 14 The references to the Hou Hanshu are Thierry 2005.
- 15 Marshall 1951, vol. 2, p. 605. In the first excavation report (Marshall 1912-1913) he clearly dated these even earlier: '[...] buried beneath the floor of the chamber (C18, Block E) about the middle of the 1st c. B.C.'



Travels in Afghanistan... the last missing link in time and space...

Drink wine in the citadel of Kabul
and let the cup go round again
For Kabul is all and everywhere
mountains, city, sea and plain

Keep yourself from sombre thoughts
One sigh, and the world drowns in sorrow

Babur (1483-1530)



Kunduz, 1937
Photograph Musée Guimet

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Afghan rider, miniature from General Court,
MNA-Guimet, BG 39741
Photograph Thierry Ollivier

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'Conjectures on the march of Alexander', General Court,
in: *Journal of the Asiatic Society of Bengal*, 1836
Photograph Musée Guimet



The 'Treasure of the Oxus'

The 'Treasure of the Oxus', a discovery published in 1881 in the *Journal of the Asiatic Society of Bengal*, consisted, like the later finds from Mir Zakah in 1992, of a large number of gold objects from different periods, including the eras of the Achaemenids, the Greeks and possibly also the Kushan dynasty. Many of these objects surfaced in local markets in Peshawar and Rawalpindi, where they were purchased on behalf of the British Museum. Central Asia (Bactria) is awash with treasures: Alexander Burnes, during his cultural expedition, came into the possession of a silver plate which was once the property of the Emir of Badakhshan, who claimed descent from Alexander the Great. This plate, now in the possession of the British Museum, bears images depicting the triumphal procession of Dionysus.

'In the year 1877, on the north bank of the Oxus, near the town of Takht-i-Kuwat, opposite Khulm and two days journey from Kunduz, there was found a large treasure of gold and silver figures, ornaments and coins, most of which have been brought to India for sale. [...] The finders quarreled about the division of the spoils, and several of the larger objects were cut to pieces for the sake of a ready settlement of accounts on the spot.'

'Relics from Ancient Persia in Gold, Silver and Copper', A Cunningham, in: *Journal of the Asiatic Society of Bengal*, 1881.



'Relics from Ancient Persia',
A Cunningham, in: *Journal of the Asiatic Society of Bengal*, 1881
Photograph Musée Guimet

>
Journal of the Asiatic Society of Bengal, 1881
Photograph Musée Guimet

ORNAMENTS

ALL GOLD.

FINGER
RING.

176 GRS.



EAR-RING.



1

48 GRS.

FINGER
RING.
77 GRS.



BRACELETS.



4

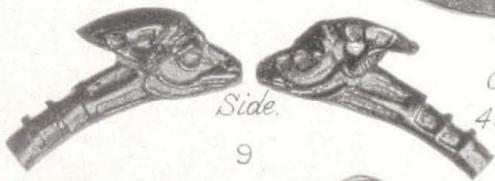
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7



8

BELT
CLASP.
486 GRS.



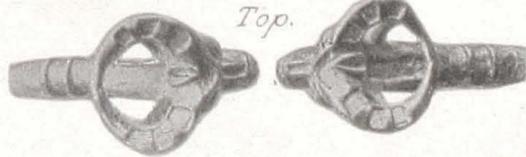
Side.

9



Side.

10



11

TORQUES.

12





1. Remparts Ouest



2. Remparts N.O.



3. Porte de l'Ouest

4. Enclos des templiers à
Saqqâra dans le
Djangal le remparts5. Porte de Balkh
à Maçan.

Oxus à Toush

Djangal le long
de l'Oxus

a/b/ Djangal dans la vallée de Kouran

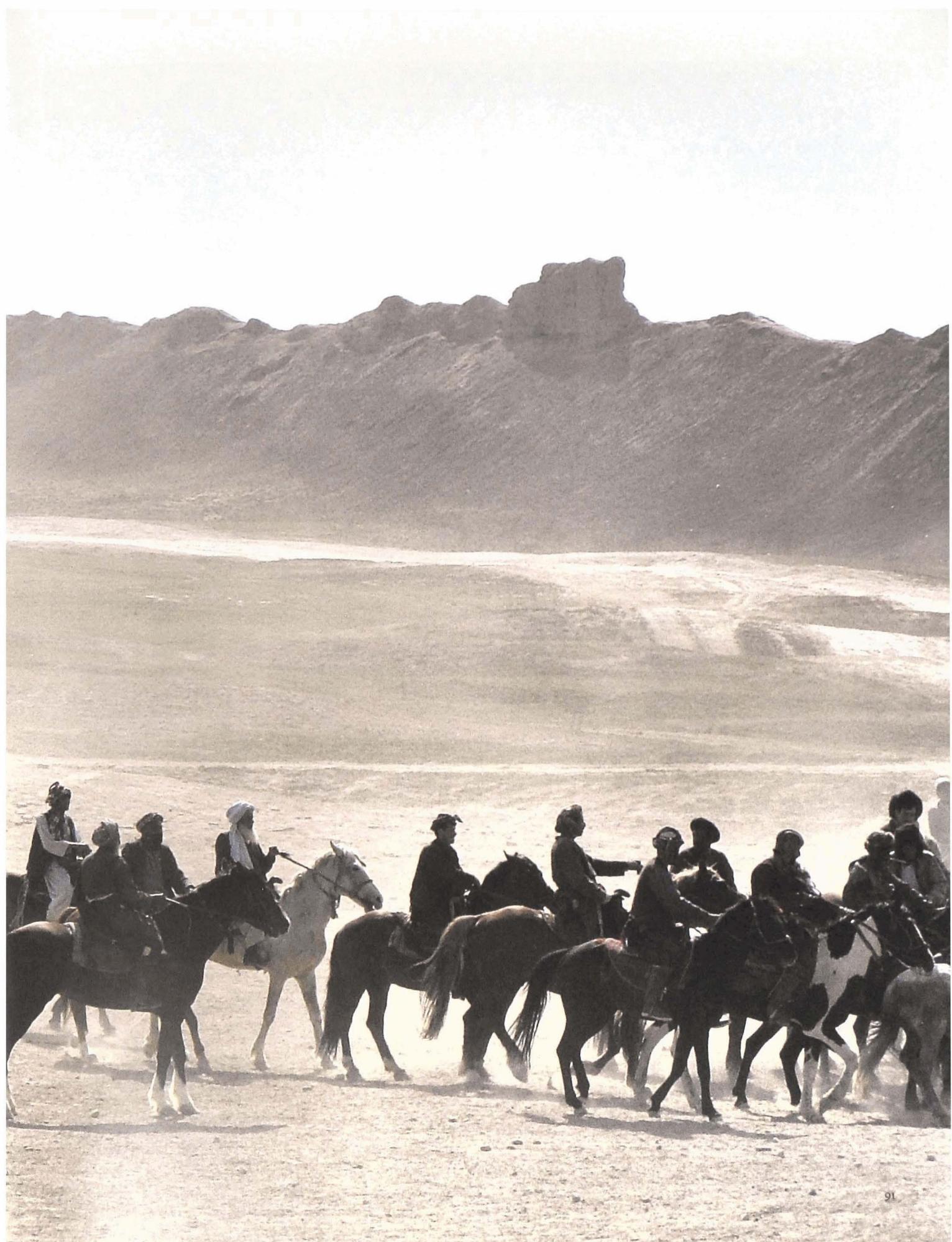
Vallée de
OuamarBalkh, Jules Barthoux Expedition
Photograph Musée GuimetOn the banks of the Oxus, Jules Barthoux Expedition
Photograph Musée Guimet

The ancient city of Balkh

Following his first archaeological expedition to Hadda, Jules Barthoux travelled on to Balkh. According to Alfred Fouquer, anyone who travelled to Afghanistan had a moral obligation to make this pilgrimage. This obligation arose from the *opinion savante*, the guiding vision then holding sway in scientific circles in Paris, which was fascinated by the heroic epic of Alexander the Great. For it was in Balkh, the former capital of Greek Bactria, where the youthful conqueror entered into marriage with the beautiful Roxana, the daughter of an aristocrat from Sogdiana, and also where he realised his dream of uniting East and West.

Following his visit to Balkh, Jules Barthoux continued his journey to the northwest of the country, following the course of the Oxus via the road to Badakhshan just as Marco Polo had done long before. Marco Polo reported that 'purple rubies' and other precious stones were pulled from the earth under the watchful eyes of fearsome guards. This was also the source of lapis lazuli, which was sent to the four corners of the ancient world from what is now Afghanistan. During his journey Jules Barthoux identified Ai Khanum.

>
Balkh, 2005, the citadel
Photograph David Jurie



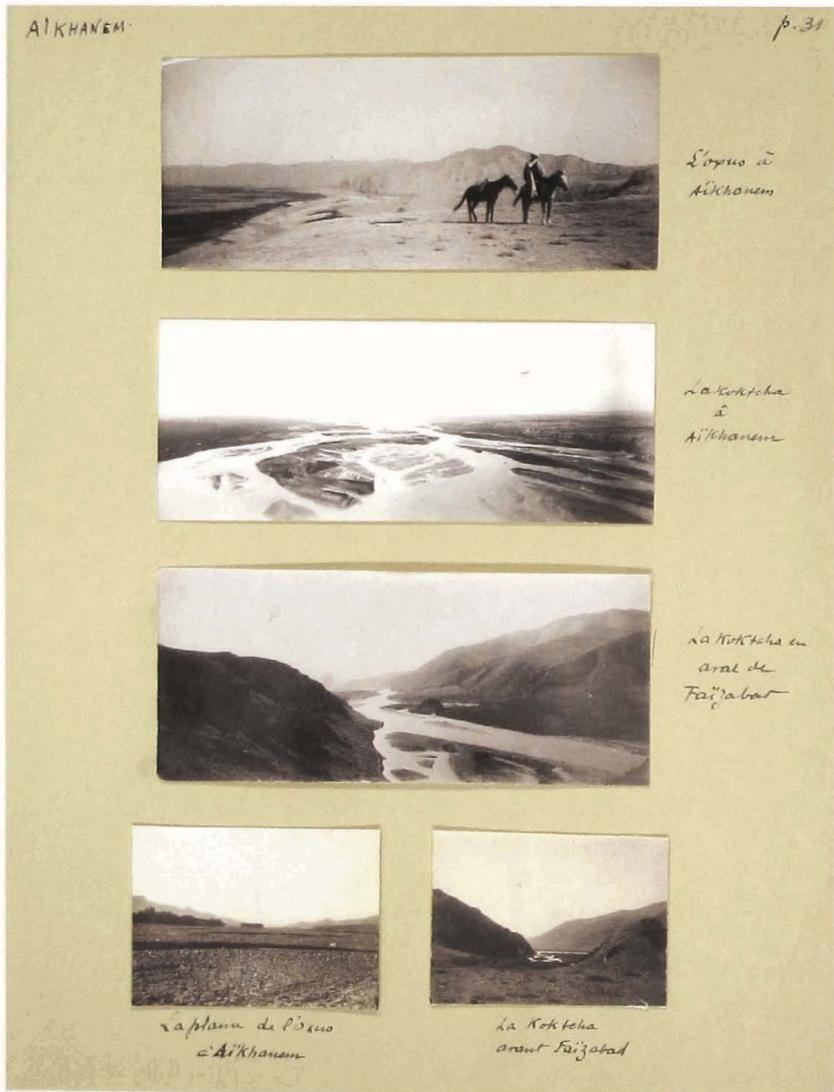
The archaeological site at Ai Khanum

'To the north of Rostaq, at the mouth of the Kokcha, lies an extensive site from antiquity. Only the citadel now stands, rising from the southern extremity on a small plateau of roughly 300 to 400 by 150 metres. To the north the plateau descends in terraces, running alongside the Oxus for at least another kilometre [...]. Between the citadel and the river,

around the central part of the city walls, lies a two metre fragment of a column some 80 centimetres in diameter. It would appear to have fallen from the edge of the city wall. Earlier, by which I mean some ten years back, a pedestal or capital lay here also, but that, so close to the river, has fallen into the water, which here is at least two metres deep.'

Jules Barthoux reported being shown an extensive necropolis by the inhabitants of a village some two kilometres south of Ai Khanum. 'According to the inhabitants, the bones are placed in large terracotta jars with a diameter of three to four metres. This is reminiscent of the tombs found at Persepolis in Mesopotamia. It seems certain that excavations at this site would be enormously successful. This may not be true of the necropolis, but it is certainly the case with the site of the citadel, about which I am very hopeful. I identify this site with the ancient city of Amu, after which the river Amu Darya [the Oxus] is named.'

Jules Barthoux, 'Travels in Turkestan and Badakhshan', report of expedition no. 38, December 1926, Musée Guimet Archive



At the confluence of the Oxus and the Kokcha,
Jules Barthoux Expedition
Photograph Musée Guimet

Jules Barthoux at the archaeological site at Ai Khanum
Photograph Musée Guimet



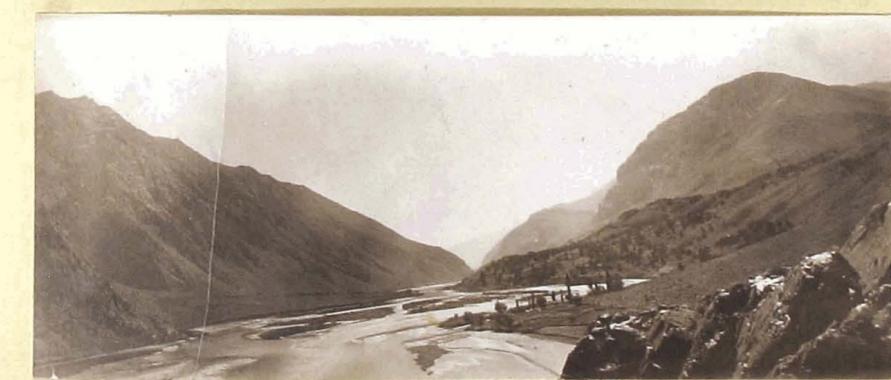
OXUS à
Aïkhanem



OXUS à
Ouamar

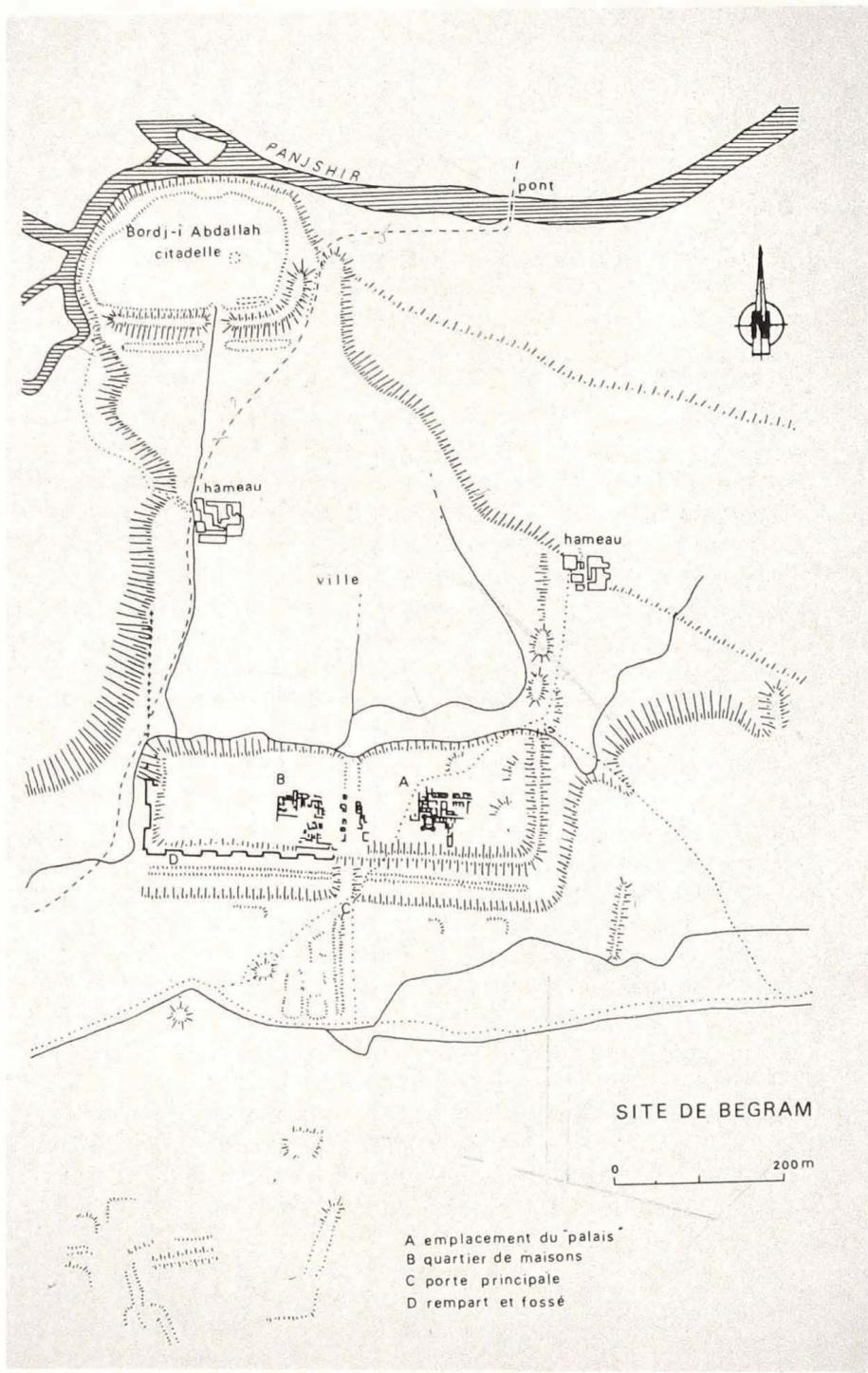


à
Khouné

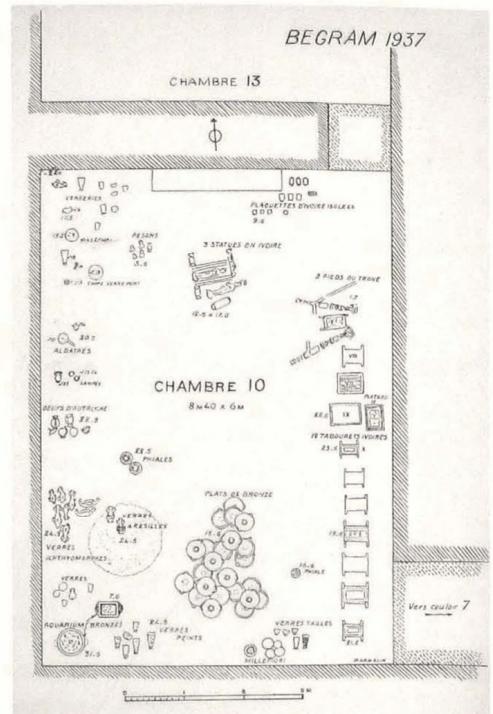


Chighnan

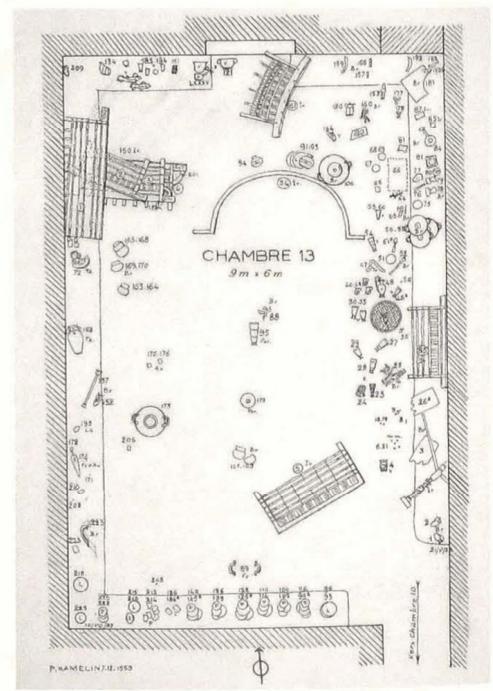
The 'Begram treasure'



Begram, map of the site
Photograph Musée Guimet



1937, chamber 10
Photograph Musée Guimet



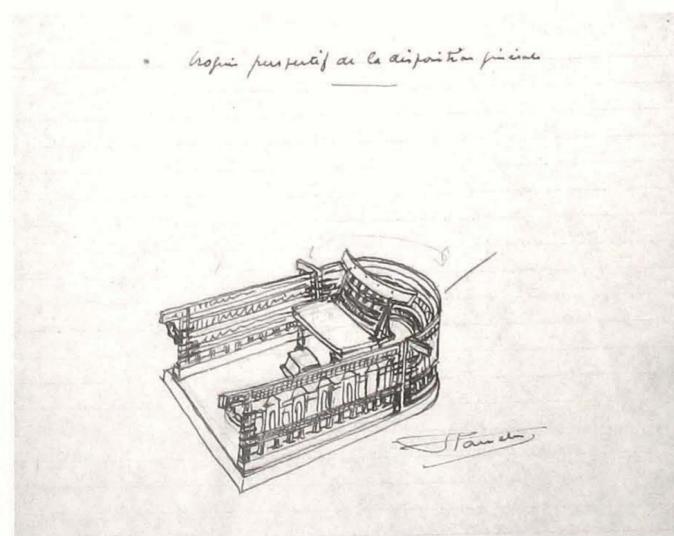
1939, chamber 13
Photograph Musée Guimet

A start was made in 1936 on archaeological investigations at Begram, the former 'Alexandria of the Caucasus' and the summer residence of the Kushan emperor Kanishka. The work commenced with excavation project I, 'the Bazaar', in the area identified by Alfred Fouquer as 'the new royal city'. Project II followed in 1937 with the discovery of the 'treasure' in chamber 10. A second treasure chamber was excavated in

1939. This was chamber 13, adjacent to chamber 10, and containing the same eclectic mixture of objects from India, China and also the West. Pierre Hamelin, who took part in the excavation as a restorer, attempted to make reconstructions of the material from India using ivory veneers.

The excavations were suspended on 3 July 1940. They were never completed, although in his

final report Joseph Hackin proposed to continue the work. He wrote: 'Note that the chamber in the north east tower [...] has not yet been fully exposed, since the tower occupies its southern side. When the excavations are resumed it would therefore be wise to remove the tower, so that the chamber can be exposed right down to the base.'



Begram, aerial photograph of the site
(Jean Carl, 1939)
Photograph Musée Guimet

Reconstruction of a piece of ivory furniture,
sketch by Pierre Hamelin
Photograph Musée Guimet



Kunduz, 1937
Photograph Musée Guimet

Begram, 1939, discovery of
ivory objects, chamber 13
Photograph Musée Guimet

Joseph Hackin, 1931, during
the Croisière jaune
Photograph Musée Guimet



Because Joseph Hackin was held in such high regard as a curator and director of the Musée Guimet in Paris, and had taken part as an archaeologist in the *Croisière jaune* (a car rally organised by André Citroën which travelled from Beirut to China) in 1931, and also on account of his role during the 'political events in Kabul' in 1929 (while the country was in the grip of a popular uprising), he was appointed as field director of the Délégation Archéologique Française en Afghanistan (DAFA), with the result that the excavations at the Begram site came under his direction. Between the two Begram expeditions he travelled north to the Balkh region, and identified the historical area around the city of Kunduz.



Begram, 1937, ivory 'goddess'
Photograph Musée Guimet, DAFA fund

Begram, 1939, exposure of ivory
artefacts, chamber 13
Photograph Musée Guimet, DAFA fund



Ai Khanum, the hill of 'Lady Moon'

During a hunting party, King Zahir Shah was shown Greek remains at Ai Khanum. He immediately reported this to Daniel Schlumberger, then Director of the DAFA, who inspected the site in 1964. French-Afghan excavations revealed

a city of the Hellenistic era on the banks of the Oxus, on the border between Afghanistan and the (then) Soviet Union. Paul Bernard led the excavation work from 1965 to 1980.

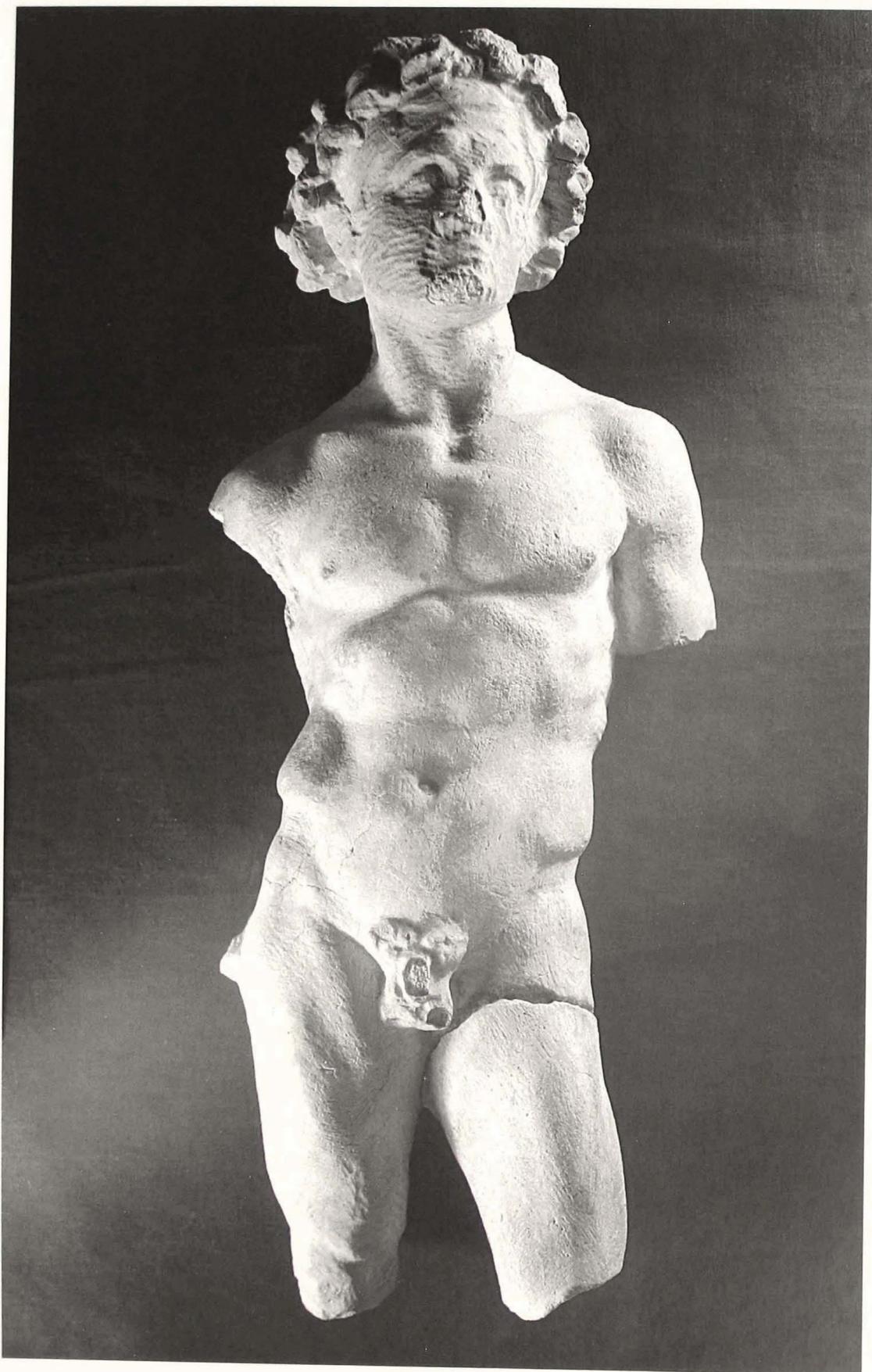
Ai Khanum, map of the archaeological site, drawing G. Lecuyot
Photograph Musée Guimet





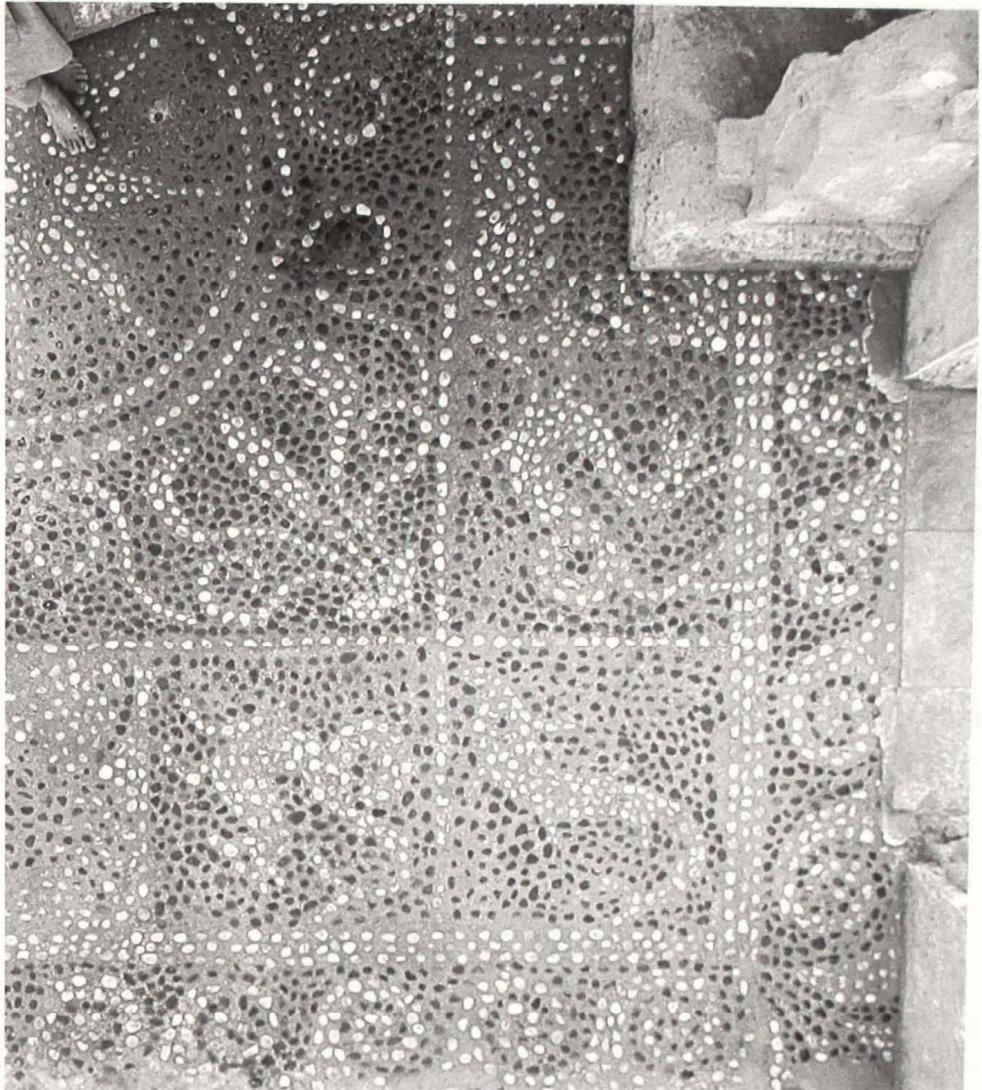
Ai Khanum, site of the palace
Photograph Musée Guimet, DAFA fund

Ai Khanum, 'Alexandria on the Oxus'



Ai Khanum, naked youth
with laurel wreath
Photograph Musée Guimet,
DAFA fund

On 15 July 1925 Alfred Fouche, not without some humour, drew up a balance sheet for his largely unsuccessful excavations at the archaeological site at Balkh. He wrote to Séart: 'The Greek rulers of Bactria failed in their essential obligations to our later, educated societies, not having built their temples and palaces – the walls scrupulously provided with inscriptions – in marble, or even in limestone, which can be found just a stone's throw away at the foot of the Elburz. The Greek bandit lords are above all unforgivable in our eyes because throughout the two centuries when they ruled this rich land they found time only to mint coins (very beautiful coins it must be said), and to cut one another's throats in an effort to obtain them' (Fouche 1942). But these rulers of Bactria may now be rehabilitated, thanks to the excavations at Ai Khanum: they now have a more 'classical' image.



Ai Khanum, mosaic
Photograph Musée Guimet, DAFA fund

Ai Khanum, Corinthian capital
Photograph Musée Guimet, DAFA fund



Tillya-tepe, the 'Hill of Gold'



Along Afghanistan's northern border, one hundred kilometres west of the Bactra oasis and near the town of Sheberghan, a Russian-Afghan archaeological research team discovered six graves in 1978, in a desert region close to the steppes. They were well-preserved, intact nomad burials from the start of the present era. One grave contained the remains of a prince, aged around thirty, in the prime of life, while nearby lay a princess, probably even younger, together with her household.

The Afghan border in the vicinity of Sheberghan
Photographs DAFA



The archaeological site at Tillya-tepe,
examination of jewellery
Photograph Musée Guimet

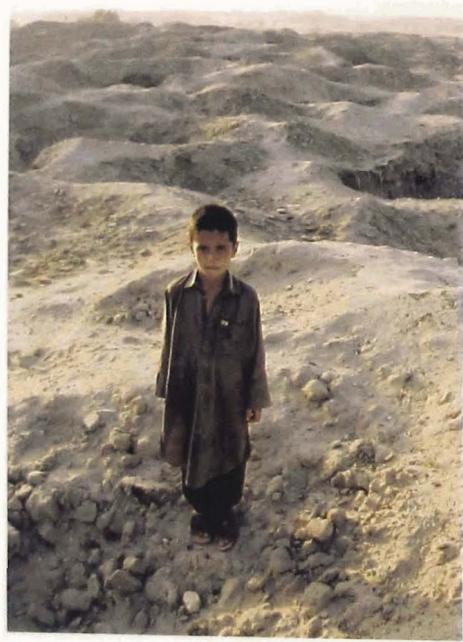
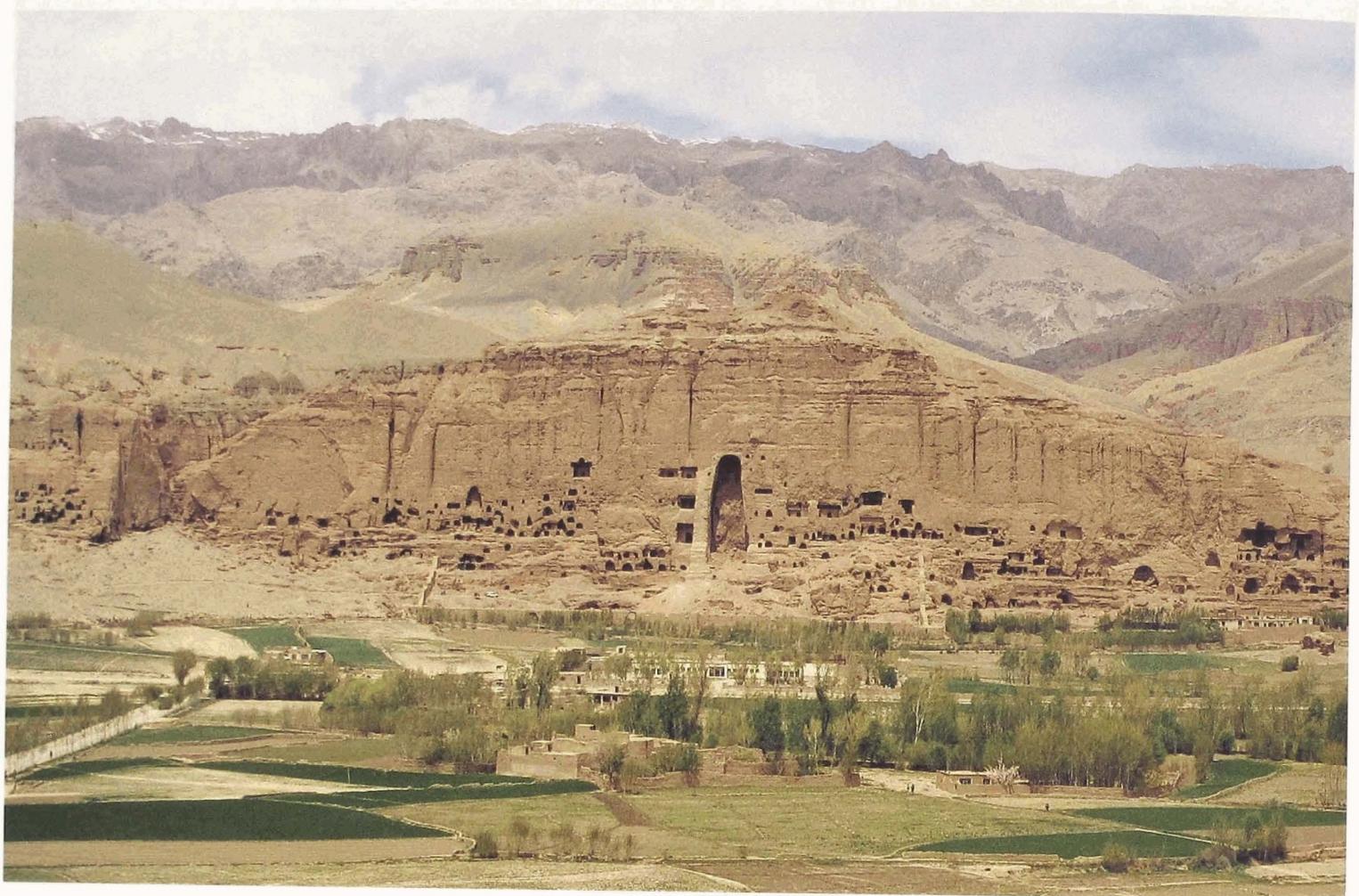
An air of secrecy still hangs over this burial field, and the occupants will remain anonymous as long as the discussion continues about their possible relationship to either the Scythians or the Yuezhi. What is certain is that the objects found, of gold with fine turquoise inlay work, are so refined and decorative as to invite speculation about contacts with remote regions. Such speculation opened the way to myth-making.



Tillya-tepe, grave IV, gold sheath
with turquoise inlay (cat. no. 113)
Photograph Musée Guimet

Tillya-tepe, grave VI, pendants with goddess,
'the mistress of the animals' (cat. no. 137)
Photograph Musée Guimet

The Bamiyan plain, heart of the Hindu Kush



Afghanistan 2002, following years of tumult and madness, peace descends again over the Bamiyan plain. The gigantic Buddhas, one 53 metres high and the other 38 metres, which centuries before had watched the army of Genghis Khan and Aurangzeb pass by, have now vanished forever, destroyed by dynamite on 11 March 2001.

Now comes a time for peace and reflection. A time to lick wounds, to count the cost,

to cautiously put this beautiful place back on the map. Systematic looting and illegal excavations have turned much of central Afghanistan into a moonscape, although some sites, like Surkh Kotal, the 'dynastic' temple founded by the Kushan emperor Kanishka, have been preserved.

In Afghan Bactria, not far from Rabatak, an inscription found by chance lists the genealogy of the Kushan dynasties. During the excava-

tions at Surkh Kotal in 1960, Daniel Schlumberger published an article which rapidly became a standard reference, *Descendants non méditerranéens de l'art grec*. Here he emphasised the confusion caused by the art of the Kushan Empire, which is often more Hellenistic in appearance than the art of the Parthians from the Hellenistic period.



<
Bamiyan, the cliff with the Buddha statues
Photograph Pierre Cambon

Balkh region, illegal excavations
Photograph Pierre Cambon

The Bamiyan plain
Photograph Pierre Cambon

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Surkh Kotal, temple of Kanishka
in Afghan Bactria
Photograph Pierre Cambon



The market, Mazar-e Sharif
Photograph Pierre Cambon

The National Museum of Afghanistan in Kabul



2002, Darul Aman, National Museum
Photograph Pierre Cambon

The objects from Surkh Kotal were greatly damaged during their time in the National Museum. This is all the more regrettable when we consider that Surkh Kotal is symbolic of a nomadic empire extending from India to the mountains north of modern Afghanistan, with Afghan territory at its centre. Surkh Kotal typifies the characteristically Afghan mixture of Greek survivals and Iranian influences, with a touch of colour from the steppes, all set off against the backdrop of the Indian subcontinent.

2002 marked the return of peace. The exhibition *Afghanistan, une histoire millénaire* had opened in Barcelona in the autumn of 2001 against the background of terrorism and the threat of war, but by 2002, it opened in Paris as a symbol of peace.

In 2003, a start was made on the recovery of the ancient history of Afghanistan, which lay in ruins after twenty years of conflict. A team was put together by the Musée Guimet to work in collaboration with the National Museum

of Afghanistan in Kabul. The team first set to work on assembling the fragments of the statue of Kanishka, and scratched their heads over how it was to be reconstructed. The statue was maliciously destroyed in March 2001, simply because it decorated the entrance to the museum in Kabul.



2002, Darul Aman, National Museum
Photograph Pierre Cambon

Surkh Kotal, young girl with Kushan prince.
Photograph Musée Guimet, DAFA fund



The archaeological sites today

Balkh

After twenty years of warfare the various excavations each arouse different emotions. Some, like Balkh and Begram, are quite unchanged, the landscape still much as it was when seen by nineteenth century travellers like Charles Masson and General Court.

Others by contrast have been turned upside down, often as a result of illegal excavations. Ai Khanum currently resembles nothing so much as a lunar landscape, where any form of human intervention seems futile. Nevertheless, the light is the same, as are the mountains and the softly babbling rivers, a timeless landscape, the beauty of an afternoon with the ambience of Islam. Hackin was so taken by this on his first expedition in 1925 that this expert on Tibet turned his attention in the future to the archaeology of Afghanistan.



The citadel of Balkh
Photograph David Jurie



On the road to Al-Ghata, where
the DAFA commenced excavations
in the spring of 2005
Photograph David Jurie



Begram

'Art is the carrier of civilisations' said Joseph Hackin in an interview in 1936.

'Art provides us with knowledge about civilisations, or to put it another way, art helps us understand a civilisation better, art responds to changes in a society as a ship responds to the motion of waves, and reflects all nuances. Without the language of art, many ideas and concepts would be beyond man's comprehension and we would never become aware of them.'

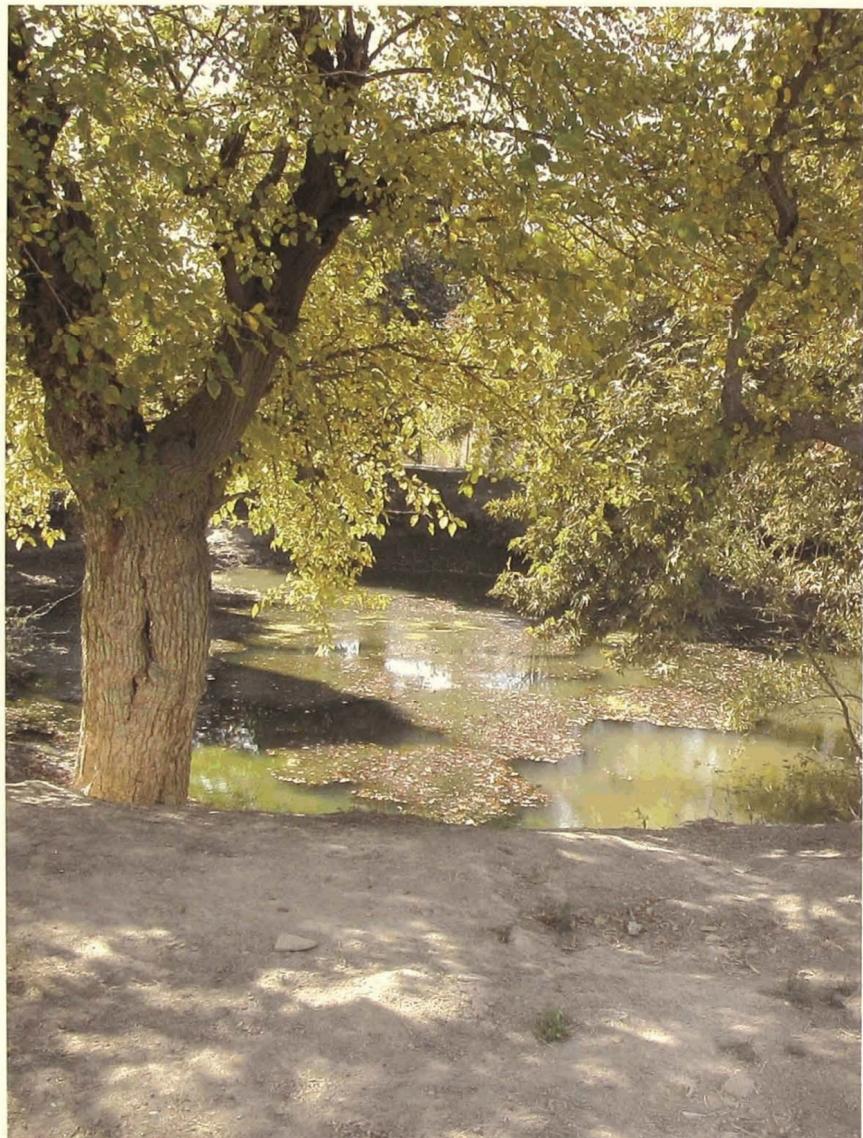
Hackin went on: 'At a certain age you must find the courage to open everything up to challenge, and force yourself to go out again in search of adventure. This is another way of holding the world up to critical examination.'



The archaeological site at Begram
Photograph David Jurie

Ai Khanum

Nowadays it seems that time has no meaning at Ai Khanum. It is a universe of clarity and light, filled with minerals. The mountains rise silently in the distance, the plain below, where once stood a city of the Hellenistic era, lies pitted with craters. This place saw Alexander's armies pass by, and the rulers of the steppes; it has seen luxury and chaos. Now silence prevails, a stony silence, caused by human folly. The mountains rise above Ai Khanum, motionless and unwavering. This place more than deserves its title, the Land of Lady Moon. The seekers of gold came across the river here, to plunder the ground in their search for improbable treasures – 'treasure-hunters' in gangs, blinded by madness and illusion or pulled along by their dreams, the epic tale of Alexander or the Bactrian Gold.



Column capital at the Ai Khanum site
Photograph DAFA

The river in spring
Photograph David Jurie



Ai Khanum, the lower town
Photograph DAFA

Recent excavations at Balkh



Tepe Zargaran, 'Hill of the Goldsmith'

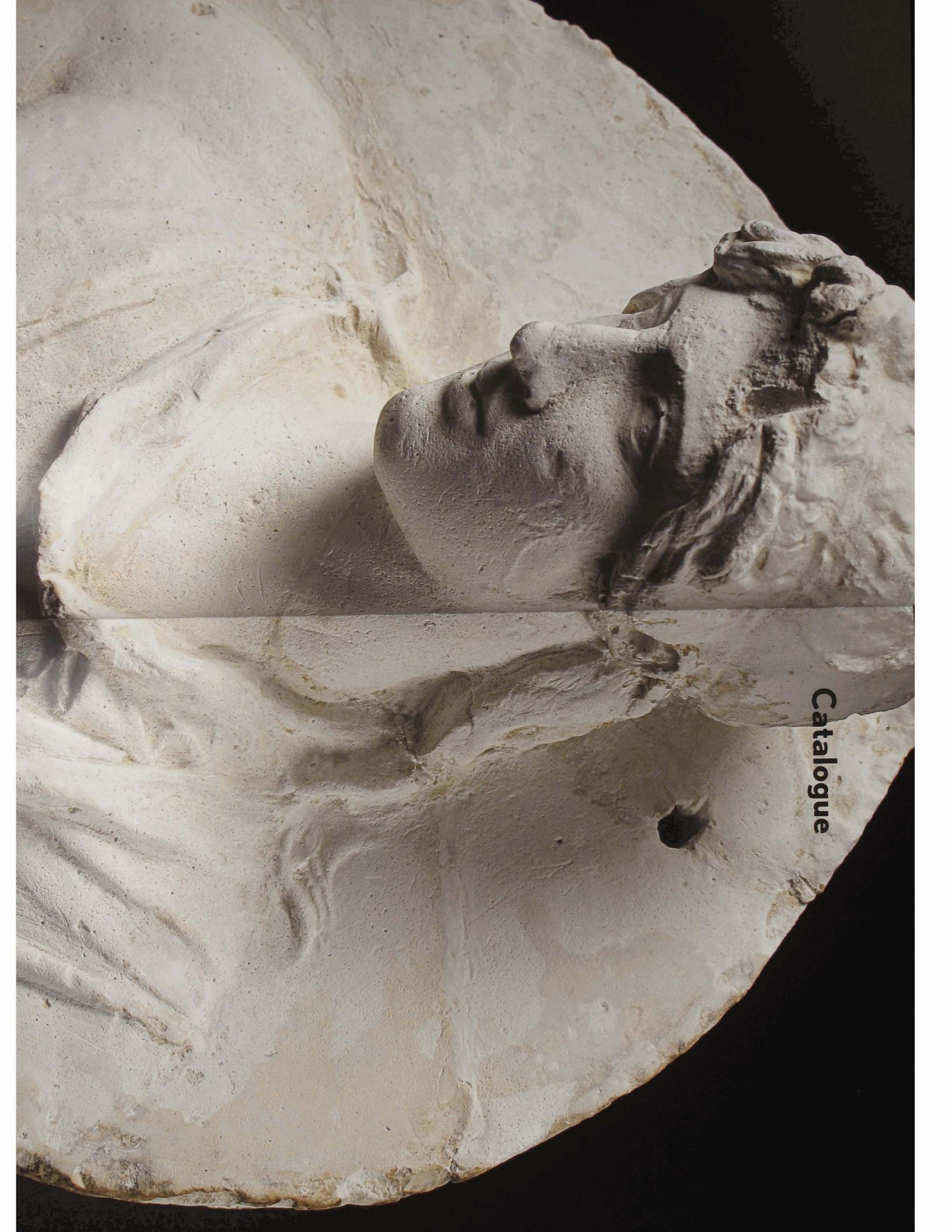
The existence of this site was rediscovered thanks to scattered Greek column capitals in a village ringed with gardens. It had long been known that remnants of ancient times were to be found at Tepe Zargaran, the 'Hill of the Goldsmith', but the very recent discovery of a structure in the Graeco-Kushan style was so intriguing as to demand further archaeological investigation. This was duly carried out by the

DAFA, who resumed their interrupted work in 2003. The aim of the recent study has been to gain a better understanding of the ancient city of Bactra, and so to continue the work of Alfred Fouche. There is a better opportunity to achieve this than there was in his time, when the necessary time and funds for such an immense excavation were simply not available. At the site of the former citadel, layers of earth laid down at the time of the Greeks and even the Achaemenids have already been reached.

Corinthian column capitals at Tepe Zargaran
Photograph DAFA

>
Citadel at Balkh, borings
and stratigraphic section
Photographs DAFA



A high-angle, close-up photograph of a classical marble relief sculpture. The sculpture depicts a human head and shoulders, rendered in a realistic style with detailed hair and facial features. The marble is light-colored with visible veining and texture. The background is dark, making the light-colored marble stand out.

Catalogue

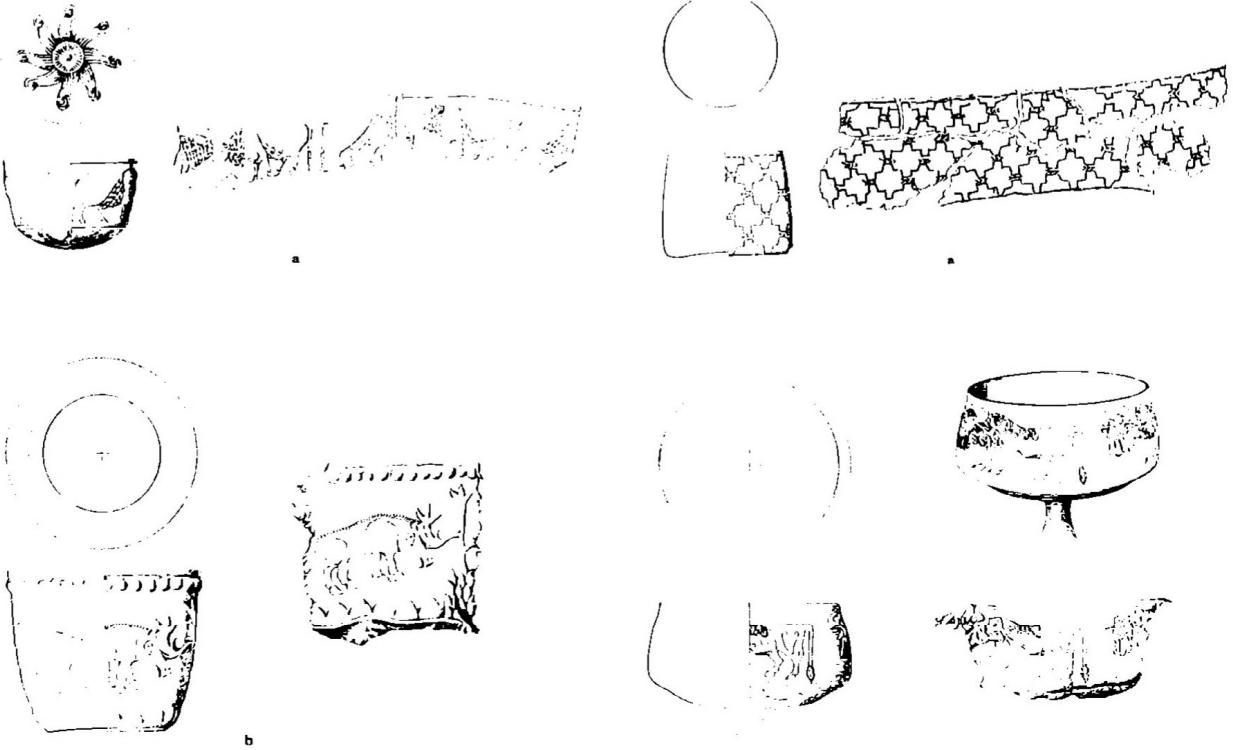
Tepe Fullol

Jean-François Jarrige

In July 1966 a group of farmers made the chance discovery of several gold and silver vessels close to Fullol, south of the city of Baghlan in southern Afghanistan. They hacked these to pieces with a hatchet and shared the pieces equally between themselves. But five gold and seven silver vessels as well as various fragments were recovered thanks to a speedy intervention by the local authorities. These precious finds were taken to the National Museum in Kabul. Further excavations at the site of these finds revealed a skeleton, leading to the suspicion that these must be grave goods.

Of the five gold bowls only three have been recovered, all of which are on view in this exhibition. The present location of the silver bowls is unknown. According to the National Museum, one silver bowl was among the objects taken to the Ministry of Culture and Information in 1989, and another was spotted on the London art market. The first bowl shown in this catalogue originally stood on a single foot. The cruciform geometric decorations on the panels are reminiscent of motifs found on ceramics in the styles of Quetta in Balochistan, Pakistan, Namazga III in Turkmenistan and particularly Mundigak in western

Fullol hoard,
four silver beakers
National Museum
of Afghanistan
Photographs Musée Guimet



Afghanistan, from about 2700-2600 BC. Other geometric motifs, offering some similarities with the Quetta style, appear on another small cylindrical silver bowl from Tepe Fullol. Such similarities were thought by some specialists to indicate that some of the Tepe Fullol bowls could date from a period slightly before 2500 BC. But although the geometric motifs on the gold vessels were reminiscent of some of those found on ceramics from the first half of the third millennium BC, it is now clear that they should rather be placed within a chronological context between 2200 and 1800 BC.

The second bowl shown in this catalogue is decorated with depictions of wild boars in a mountain landscape, with a tree whose branches end in three-lobed leaves. While the boar may be a local decorative element, the tree on the mountain range is a frequently occurring motif on Mesopotamian seals from the Akkad period (around 2300 BC) and the immediately succeeding Ur III and Isin-Larsa periods. A silver bowl from Gonur-depe in Turkmenistan, which can be dated from around the same time, also shows animals in a landscape with trees on mountain ranges. The third bowl also originally stood on a single foot. A frieze of bulls or bison adorns the bowl, with their bodies in profile and the heads face on. The heads have bearded, almost human faces. These bearded bulls resemble certain Mesopotamian iconography from the end of the third

millennium BC, but have also notable stylistic characteristics of their own.

The excavations at Togolok-depe and Gonur-depe in Turkmenistan, as well as certain other isolated finds, place the Tepe Fullol vessels in a new light. It is true that elements can be seen which might be connected with Mesopotamian iconography, but they are now included on a list of gold and silver vessels discovered during the last thirty years, luxurious objects belonging to groups populating a huge area extending from the southern and eastern borders of Iran to the western boundary of the Indus valley, from 2200 to 1800 BC. This is a period of major Iranian migration waves. Advances in research now allow a better assessment of the influence that these contacts may have had on economic prosperity in Mesopotamia at the time of Ur III and Isin-Larsa. The emergence of groups displaying great wealth in the region of the Oxus river (modern Amu Darya) and areas of the Indo-Iranian border regions, for instance Balochistan, has to be understood as the result of a network of commercial and cultural exchanges. We can now call this an 'Oxus civilisation'. It undoubtedly also had a major impact on large-scale developments marking the last urban period of the Indus culture in Pakistan at the end of the third millennium BC.



1 **Goblet with geometrical motifs**

Tepe Fullol
Bronze Age: c. 2100-2000 BC
Gold
Ø 9.9 cm
National Museum of Afghanistan
MK 04.29.1

2 **Bowl, with boar and tree
on a mountain range**

Tepe Fullol
Bronze Age: c. 2100-2000 BC
Gold
H 11.6 cm
National Museum of Afghanistan
MK 04.29.3

3 **Bowl decorated with
bearded bulls**

Tepe Fullol
Bronze Age: c. 2100-2000 BC
Gold
H 14.9 cm
National Museum of Afghanistan
MK 04.29.5



In the footsteps of Alexander, from Balkh to Ai Khanum

Pierre Cambon

Within a period of four years (334-330 BC) three-quarters of the Iranian Achaemenid Empire fell to pieces as a result of the relentless advance of Alexander the Great. Anatolia, Egypt and Iran were subjugated in no time by the young Macedonian conqueror. The Achaemenid capital Persepolis was burned to the ground following a nocturnal drinking-bout. But almost the same time was required to conquer the eastern satrapies (provinces) too: Bactria and the rest of the present Afghanistan, Sogdiana and Gandhara, which had been conquered by Cyrus the Great in the sixth century BC. Here Alexander stumbled on heavy opposition. After crossing the snow-covered Hindu Kush, not without a little trouble, he decided to pause on the banks of the Oxus, where he discovered the completely different and itinerant world of the steppe nomads.

History has preserved the words addressed to him by the Scythian envoys: 'If the gods gave you a body the size of your ambition, the universe would be too small to contain it; with one hand you would touch the east, with the other the west. You would still not be satisfied with this, and would want to follow the sun to know where he hides. You claim to have come to root out thieves, but you are the greatest thief of all. The nations you have conquered were plundered and ruined; you conquered Lydia and occupied Syria, Persia and Bactria; you invaded India, and now you come here to steal our herds. Cross the Tanais river and you will realize how vast our plains are. You can try to follow the Scythians; I defy you to actually find them' (Quintus Curtius, *De rebus gestis Alexandri Magni*, book VII, chapter VIII; the Tanais is probably the Jaxartes, at present the Syr Darya). Alexander, however, learned from the past – Cyrus was ruined by the Scythians – and decided not to expand his expedition into the northern plains. After making Bactria the outermost defense post against the nomads on his left flank, he launched into the conquest of India. This exploit evolved along the same lines as the conquest by the Achaemenid king Darius the Great at the beginning of the fifth century BC. And although the Macedonian hero believed that he was sent by the gods, that he was a direct descendent of the god Dionysus and was currently following in his tracks on a mythical journey to the end of the world (according to a fictitious passage in Plutarch's *Moralia*, 332a), he was confronted by the exhaustion of his soldiers who, in addition, were intimidated by pugnacious elephants. He also faced the vastness of the Indian continent and the difficult climatic conditions. Thus, he was wise enough to discontinue his conquests when he reached

the sandy expanses, at the gate to unknown worlds about which the strangest stories are told. This attempt to conquer India will however linger in the Greek imagination for a very long time. This explains the expeditions organised by Seleucus I, the successor of Alexander, in 306 BC, and by Antiochus III in 206 BC. The first expedition had to contend with the ascent of a new power, the Maurya Empire, which was the first historic empire of ancient India (c. 322-184 BC); the second expedition had to endure the continuous internal conflicts in the Mediterranean area. Both rulers therefore broke off their invasion attempts, and Graeco-Bactria thus became the most easterly located Greek (Hellenistic) region.

Ai Khanum or 'Lady Moon', which is the current Uzbek name (the old name was lost in ancient times) was founded by Alexander the Great, or possibly by Seleucus I, in the fourth century BC. It was a Greek city on the borders of the Hellenistic world. This city was situated on the banks of the Oxus river (at present called Amu Darya) facing the vast expanse of the steppes. It adopted the Greek lifestyle, with a *gymnasium* (sports school), a theatre and a hero's shrine dedicated to Kineas, which proudly bears the Delphic precepts copied at Clearachus of Soli's request. The palace complex was colossal, as can be surmised from the excavated Corinthian column capitals (cat. no. 24), whilst the indented temple demonstrates that there was a symbiosis with local eastern traditions too.

In his *Historiae Philippicae* excerpt from Pompeius Trogus, Book 1, Chapter 1, we can read in Junianus Justinus about Bactria: 'Zarathustra [Zoroaster], king of the Bactrians, is said to have created magic', and a little further on he says: 'He was the first to actively go in search of the principles of the world and the movement of the stars.' The engraved shards found later in Ai Khanum, however, demonstrate that the Greek language was not stamped out, a sign of loyalty towards the Hellenistic model. It needs to be mentioned however that Bactria also had interactions with the Indian world, a fact established by the discovery of the mother-of-pearl disc inlaid with pieces of colored glass (cat. no. 9).

> One of the *pyxids* cat. no. 20



Ai Khanum was part of a kingdom that became autonomous under Diodotus (around 250 BC), and which began the conquest of India under Demetrius (200-190 BC). The city attests to the Greek presence north of the Hindu Kush, something that had already been established with the finding of the remarkable gold coins. The first coin to be published was of Eucratides (170-145 BC). The German scientist in Russia Bayer described the Graeco-Bactrian Empire for the first time ever, based on this coin, in 1738 in Latin. The city disappeared from the map around 145 BC, as it was obliterated by the onslaught of nomads in the south, the Sakas and Indo-Scythians, and the Kushan dynasty or the 'Great Yuezhi', who were displaced by the Xiongnu from the east.

However, the memory of the Greek presence in Bactria has never really disappeared. One proof is the *Alexander Romance*, a collection of romanticized books pertaining to Alexander the Great. Marco Polo mentions the recollection of the Greeks in the story of his journey through these regions. *The Description of the World*: 'Balkh [ancient Bactra, first capital of Bactria] is a stately city and rather large. In earlier times, the city was even more dignified and bigger, it was the biggest and most beautiful city in these regions, but it was often looted by the Tartars and other tribes and as a result it fell into disrepair. I can tell you that in past times there were numerous exquisite palaces and countless magnificent residences built from marble; some are still standing, but they were destroyed and fell into disrepair. I can also tell you that according to the inhabitants, Alexander the Great took the daughter of Darius, king of Persians, as his wife.' And Alexander Burnes, the first European to travel through the region in the nineteenth century, acquired a silver plate from Badakhshan (northeast Afghanistan) in Bactria, *The triumph of Dionysus* (Burnes 1842, pl. 18, pp. 203-204), which can now be found in the British Museum.

The Hellenistic influence is not found merely in Bactria. The ivory discovered in Nisa is another evidence of Hellenistic influence (Nisa was

the first Parthian capital, founded around 250 BC), as are the edicts of Ashoka, drafted in Greek and discovered in Kandahar, south of the Hindu Kush, and the Khalbayan archaeological site (now in Uzbekistan), where the sun-dried clay was firstly attributed to the very first Kushan rulers. The Greek fascination with India is irrefutably demonstrated through the pillar Heliodorus, ambassador of the Indo-Greek king Antialcidas (115-100 BC), had erected at the Indian court of Vidisha. The opposite is also true; the Indian fascination with the Yavana (in general, barbarians or foreigners, more precisely Greeks) is as passionate, for instance in the *Milindapanha* (an early Buddhist text in which king Milinda, usually identified as the Graeco-Bactrian king Menander, plays a leading part), or the establishment of Gandharan art. Bactria is the indisputable symbol of the Greek presence, it is the city *par excellence*: the city where the young conqueror Alexander the Great cherished the dream to unite the East and West under his authority. Following an excavation campaign which was rather disappointing, considering the extent of the site (and the loess accumulation), the excavation coordinator Alfred Foucher wrote to the French India scholar Émile Sénart on 15 April 1925, shortly before he had to retire due to health problems: 'My wife and I like to compare ourselves with two ants which you have sent to the jungle to perform the post-mortem examination of an elephant carcass. However, we would dearly like to complete the research on the Arg [citadel] [...]. We have the desire to at least explore the central hill of the Bala Hisar Fort and the Tepe Zargaran [...]. And even if the outcome of the Buddhist stupa, the "Hill of the Goldsmith" and the Royal City is negative, we would not be disheartened, and we would in any case remember that there is far more than solely Balkh in Bactria...' (Foucher 1942, part 1, p. 114). Taking this into account, the excavation resumptions by the Délégation Archéologique Française en Afghanistan (DAFA) in Balkh in 2004, resulting in the discovery of the Graeco-Kushan layers in the vicinity of Tepe Zargaran, become much more significant.

Ai Khanum

The Graeco-Bactrian architects always showed a clear preference for the Corinthian column with its acanthus leaf decoration over those with Doric or Ionic capitals. Two Corinthian capitals are included in the exhibition, one from Ai Khanum and another comparable example from Bactra.

4 Corinthian capital

Afghanistan, Balkh,
Tepe Zargaran
3rd-2nd century BC
Limestone
National Museum of Afghanistan
18.01.06

Height: 82 cm; surviving width 62 cm; surviving diameter of base: 48 cm, with an 11 x 12.5 cm rectangular socket, depth 5 cm.

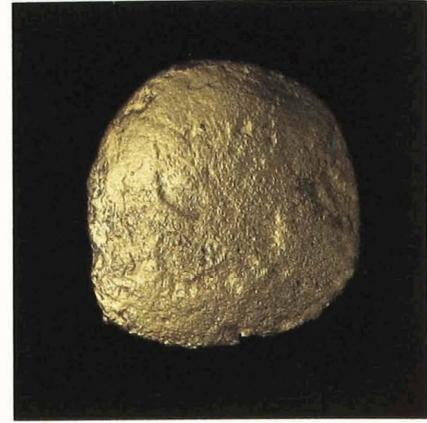
This capital is constructed along the same pattern as cat. no. 24, with four superposed and alternating rows of acanthus leaves, but these are larger and higher, so that the capital seems to be more fully enveloped by the leaves. Behind the leaves the central body of the column takes the form of an inverted cone, as is usual for a Greek capital.

The outermost protruding parts of the acanthus leaves were cut off when, sometime after the Hellenistic period, the capital was roughly reworked together with other stone architectural elements from the Graeco-Bactrian period in order to be reused in the construction of an embankment close to the old walls of Bactra, on the edge of the eastern section of the lower town now known as Tepe Zargaran (the 'Hill of the Goldsmiths'). The badly eroded block and the ferruginous discolouration of the surface indicate that the stone was exposed for a long period to a powerful stream, probably a branch of the river Bactra. Many Graeco-Bactrian architectural elements were found together with this capital, in particular capitals of the same order, column bases and drums, pilaster bases and threshold stones. These were dug up from 1992 onwards during clandestine excavations at the Tepe Zargaran site. Their discovery led to the initiation of an excavation project in 2004 by the French DAFA, with the aim of fixing the exact location of these finds and systematically exploring it (Bernard – Jarrige – Besenval 2002, pp. 1385-1428; Bernard – Besenval – Marquis 2006, pp. 439-512).



A great number of similarly worked stones have been discovered since that time. However the exact reason for the construction of the embankment, probably hastily executed, with second hand materials, is still unclear, as well as the circumstances under which it was decid-

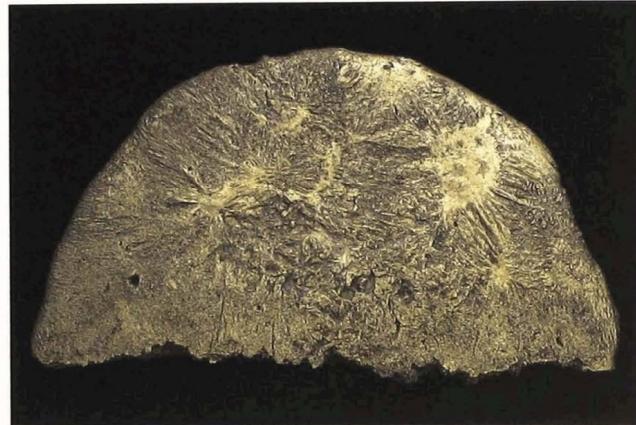
ed to dismantle some of the monumental buildings erected here by the Greek colonists, in what was the capital city of their realm, and what exactly these monuments were.



The palace treasury

5 ¹⁷ Gold ingot

Afghanistan, Ai Khanum,
Palace treasury
Shortly after 145 BC
5.23 x 5.90 cm, 322 g
National Museum of Afghanistan
MK 04.42.1



6 ¹⁷ Gold ingot

Afghanistan, Ai Khanum,
Palace treasury
Shortly after 145 BC
4.32 x 4.99 cm, 189 g
National Museum of Afghanistan
MK 04.42.2

7 ¹⁷ Gold ingot

Afghanistan, Ai Khanum,
Palace treasury
Shortly after 145 BC
3.21 x 3.31 cm, 103 g
National Museum of Afghanistan
MK 04.42.3

8 ¹⁷ Gold ingot

Afghanistan, Ai Khanum,
Palace treasury
Shortly after 145 BC
Ø 7.44 cm, 259 g
National Museum of Afghanistan
MK 04.42.4

Four gold cake ingots, the upper convexity of the top being the consequence of pouring the melted metal into small clay-coated dish-shaped holes dug into the ground. The gold was obtained by melting down previously worked objects.

These four gold ingots, with a total weight

of 0.873 kg, and a further eight silver ingots weighing 12.574 kg were discovered, together with a bronze pan from some weighing scales and a lead weight, hidden in a shallow cavity under a thin layer of earth in the floor of room 115 in the royal treasury. Immediately after the arrival in 145 BC of the first invading nomads, who brought about the fall of the Greek city, craftsmen were using this room for intensive metal working. They had close connections with the nomadic conquerors, since they transformed precious metal objects looted from the town, mainly probably from the palace and the treasury itself, into ingots for them. One of the silver ingots bears an inscription in an unknown script (Rapin 1992, pp. 139-142, pl. 66). Although we are unable to read the script we are certain that the language, which is not Greek, is not that of the local Bactrian population either, which was only written down much later. The alphabet closely resembles that of an inscription on a silver bowl from the famous burial mound of 'the Golden Man' at Issyk in Kazakhstan, where a nomad chief had been buried in sumptuous attire decorated with gold. The metalworkers must have ceased

their activities suddenly, because they had barely time to bury the valuable ingots in an improvised hiding place. Whether or not they belonged to the nomad community, this sudden interruption of their activity can only be explained by the hasty departure of the nomads themselves, the reasons for which remain unknown to us. The local population then entered the buildings abandoned by the Greeks, in particular room 115 in the palace treasury, but the cache was not discovered. This second reoccupation was itself brought to an abrupt end by a second wave of invading nomads, this time the Yuezhi, the ancestors of the Kushan rulers. The history of the precious metal ingots is therefore closely bound up with the first attacks on Bactria by nomadic tribes, which led to the destruction of the Greek city of Ai Khanum.

Rapin 1992, pp. 70-71, 146-147, 288-294, 318, pl. 65, 112; cf. pl. 28-29, 104

Disc, from India

Afghanistan, Ai Khanum,
Palace treasury
Before 145 BC
Mollusc shell (*Xancus pyrum*),
coloured glass and gold thread
Ø 20.5 cm
National Museum of Afghanistan
MK 05.42.25

The decoration, with the missing parts plausibly reconstructed by Rapin on the basis of numerous Indian parallels, is divided into two sections, a main central panel surrounded by a circular frame. The lower part of the main panel shows a royal procession, shielded by a parasol, consisting of three people on a chariot, escorted by three riders and passing in front of a number of spectators through a landscape of flowers and various animals typical of Indian fauna, including peacocks and deer. In the centre rise the shafts of four pillars with bulbous

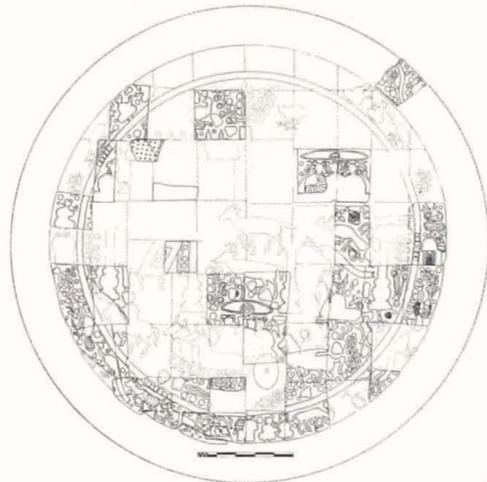
bases. In the upper part are depictions of various personages near a typically Indian building, whose arched roof can be reconstructed with certainty on the basis of the three remaining pinnacles. The circular frieze, more static and less narrative, shows groups in conversation, buildings with arched roofs and pinnacles, peacocks and deer and, as elsewhere, blossoming branches.

Rapin interprets this as a very free and allusive depiction of the famous Indian legend of Shakuntala, foster daughter of the hermit Kanva. She was seduced by King Dushyanta, who entered the garden containing the hermitage (with the pillars, perhaps indicating the boundary of the garden) during a hunting party (the chariot, the parasol and the escort), and then left her pregnant with Bharata (the eponymous ancestor of India). Eventually he acknowledged Shakuntala as his spouse and Bharata as his lawful son. The seated group

in the frieze may depict the two main protagonists in the centre of the park, repeatedly represented in support of the main theme.

The dating of this object, prior to the fall of the Greek city of Ai Khanum in 145 BC, makes this disc one of the oldest examples of Indian figurative art. The disc displays a complex narrative grammar and demonstrates the craftsmanship capable of decoration using inlaid fragments of glass whose contours are delineated by gold threads. These have survived the ages without losing anything of their bright and lively colours. A great name from the history of the Greeks in Central Asia is also linked to this unique object, that of King Eucratides, who probably collected it on one of his campaigns in India and stored it in the treasury of the city he made his capital, calling it Eucratidia. In around 145 BC, returning, as he had so many times, from India, he was murdered by his son, Heliocles. This event opened the gates of Bactria to the nomads, always alert to any sign of Greek vulnerability.

Rapin 1992, pp. 185-232, 358-366, pl. 86-95, 121-124





10 Ovoid handless amphora, with inscriptions

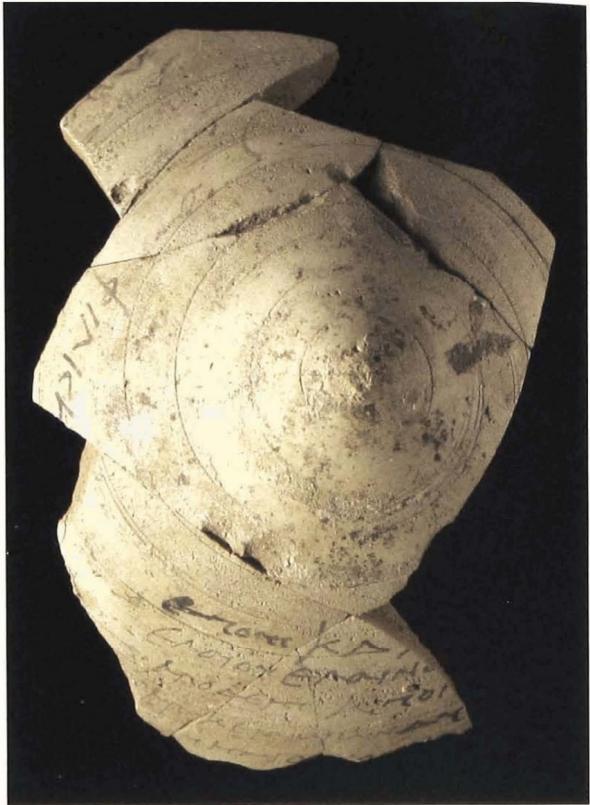
Afghanistan, Ai Khanum,
Palace treasury
Around 145 BC
Earthenware
H 41 cm; Ø 28 cm
National Museum of Afghanistan
MK 05.42.608

On the shoulder of this amphora without handles, reconstructed from some 25 fragments, two inscriptions have purposefully been scratched out to erase the record of a previous transaction, and to allow a new message of three lines to be added: '[deposited] by Cosmus in legal silver; checked by Nikeratos; sealed by Nikeratos himself.'

The amphora contained silver currency deposited by an assistant treasury official named Cosmus. Nikeratos verified that the silver was of good quality and that the coins were of the correct weight, or, in other words, that they conformed to the so-called Attic standard for

Graeco-Bactrian coinage. This precautionary measure was taken to prevent mingling with Indian coinage, which had a lower silver content and was regulated by a different standard. When Indian coins (known by numismatists as 'punch-marked coins') were deposited they were identified as such. The checker, Nikeratos, had also sealed the vessel containing the money received. This inscription clearly shows that the notations made in ink on these clay vessels were simply labels indicating the contents. In the case of this amphora the exact amount was not recorded, but in other cases this was done. Neither was the amount recorded when part of the content was withdrawn, whether it was coins or other items. The actual book-keeping was carried out separately (on tablets, papyrus or parchment) in a different room which was not found or identified. This method was also usual elsewhere in the Greek world.

Rapin 1992, pp. 101-102 (13 c), 107, 109-110, pl. 55

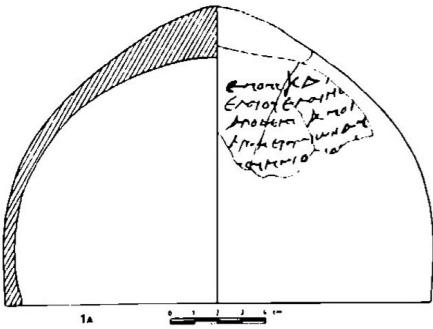


11 Fragment of vessel with inscription 'Year 24'

Afghanistan, Ai Khanum,
Palace treasury
147 BC
Earthenware
H 12.5 cm; Ø 18 cm
National Museum of Afghanistan
MK 05.42.611

Two inscriptions in ink on a bowl with a pointed base record deliveries of olive oil. The bowl had been inverted and used as a lid for an amphora (it is probably for this reason that the writing is upside down).

1 a) 'Year 24, the [...] [contents] olive oil;
The vessel A incompletely filled [from the reserve]
Decanted from two vessels (*keramiōn duo*) by ...
[In total] One and a half [*hemiolios*] (?) units
[*stamnos*] (of oil)'
Combining this inscription with the remnants of another one, which can be read on two frag-



athletes and in preparing medicines and perfumes. The oil of the (local) sesame plant was the one in general use by the colonists.

The inscribed bowl is particularly important because it is dated. The year 24 can only refer to the reign of Eucratides, the last ruler of Ai Khanum. A historical text (Junianus Justinus XLI, 6) demonstrates that his reign coincided with the administration of the Parthian ruler Mithridates I, which commenced in 171 BC. As regards the various administrators of the treasury at Ai Khanum, the Philiskos mentioned in 1 b must have succeeded the person whose name is missing from inscription 1 a. Philiskos was the last but one on the list, while Nikeratos, mentioned in cat. no. 10, and known to have been general administrator from another text, was the last. On the basis of these facts it has been concluded that the date must be $171 - 24 = 147$ BC, two years before the treasury suddenly ceased operations, as a result of the looting associated with the take-over of the city during the first wave of nomad invasions and the burning of the palace. It is for this reason that a date of 145 BC has been adopted as marking the end of the Greek city of Ai Khanum.

Rapin 1992, pp. 96 (1 a and b), 107-108, pl. 53; pp. 114, 292, 394
 Canali De Rossi 2004, p. 210, no. 329; see also p. 207, no. 323
 Müller 2005, pp. 355-484

The sanctuary of the temple with indented niches

12 Male or female head

Afghanistan, Ai Khanum,
 Temple with indented niches
 2nd century BC
 Unfired clay
 21 x 15 cm
 National Museum of Afghanistan
 MK 05.42.74

Reconstruction based on ten fragments found in 1968 among the rubble in the vestibule of the temple with indented niches. Only the outermost layer of the relief survives. The entire middle section of the forehead and the cranium are missing. The locks of hair, made separately and fixed on later, have also disappeared, apart from the four replaced above the temples. The ash grey colour was caused by the heating of the clay during the fire which destroyed the temple.

Surviving height: 21 cm (original height around 30 cm); surviving width: 15 cm; depth, front to rear: 9-10 cm; thickness of the preserved outer clay layers: 0.8-1.3 cm.

It appears that the statue was not completely three-dimensional, but in very high relief, with half depth shoulders and the skull cut at the back, standing on one of two masonry bases of sun-dried bricks, against the separating wall between the vestibule and the cult room, on either side of the door connecting the two spaces. Many small fragments of the two statues standing there and modelled in clay and plaster were found in this area. The relief was achieved by applying ever thinner layers of clay to a wooden armature, so that the relief gradually attained the desired form. It can be seen in the area of the chin that the last, peeling layer is no more than a film, no thicker than 2 mm in some places.

Sculpture, modelled in clay and plaster, was much employed by the Graeco-Bactrian artists. The material was hardened by just allowing it to dry. This technique was quicker and less costly and leant itself well to the decoration of interiors for which stone or bronze statuettes were also used. But statues in either material meant to be exhibited in open air seem to have been rare in Bactria, in strong contrast to what we are familiar with in the cities of the western world. One possible explanation is that public life was less developed in the highly hierarchical colonial society of the Graeco-Bactrian kingdom, due to the social structure and particular political makeup of the colonial community. This lacked the incentives of democracy active in the thousands of cities, big and small, of the Greek world, which used to dedicate honorary statues, exhibited publicly in the most conspicuous places, to their most deserving citizens and benefactors. At Ai Khanum, limestone or occasionally marble was used for small and middle-sized statues placed in interiors, and also for large acroliths with a wooden body. In the latter case the monumental proportions were achieved with a minimal quantity of marble. But the main legacy of Hellenism to the arts of Central Asia was the modelling of statues in clay or stucco.

The face represented is of a full oval shape, bordering on heaviness, whose wide prominent cheekbones and edge of the well-marked eyebrows are softened by the rounded and fleshy modelling of the epiderm. The eyes are wide open between the curved lids. The chin is

ments of the jar (or *stamnos*) which had the bowl as its lid, provides the following explanation: two vessels, A and B (the latter mentioned in the lost part of the text), were filled with 'one and a half units' of oil in total. Item A, identified as 'incomplete', contained oil, decanted from two vessels designated as '*keramia* [different from A and B]'. Two officials sealed A and B. However, rather than meaning 'one and a half units', the word *hemiolios*, which is also known as an official title, could very well have designated the person who made the decanting operation which accompanied the deposit of oil in the treasury. In that case, combining with the inscription on the vessel which had our bowl as a lid gives a more satisfactory sense which would be: 'Year 24 ... [contents] olive oil / vessel A incompletely filled into which were decanted / two vessels [*keramia*] by Hippias / the *hemiolios* and A was sealed / by Molossos [?] and B by Strato [?].'

1 b) On the same bowl, but to the left of the previous inscription, is a later, badly damaged text:

'By Philiskos

[...] olive oil

[...]

Incompletely filled [...] from the three [...]

[...]

Sealed

By Theophrastus.'

The exceptional fertility of the region of Bactria was widely known: everything grew there except the olive tree, which could not withstand the harsh winters (Strabo 2, II, 1, 14). Olive oil was seen as essential by the Greeks, and therefore had to be imported from the Middle East or the Mediterranean. Because of its high price it was probably used not so much in the kitchen but rather as an ointment for



heavy-set and the mouth with its slightly drooping corners reflects a melancholic mood. The full, soft features and the stern yet tender expression suggest a feminine head in a very classical style, but it has been lately remarked that the short curly hair around the forehead is a characteristically male hairstyle. Remnants of red pigment on the right cheek and temple may be traces of adhesive used to secure gold leaf, as on a plaster male head found at the same location, which had clearly been gilded in this way.

All we can say about the identity of these two persons is that they were important enough to have their statues dedicated in the main temple of the city in the last period of its existence.

Bernard 1969, p. 344, fig. 19

13 Handle of a bowl, with female busts

Afghanistan, Ai Khanum,
Courtyard of the temple
with indented niches
Around 145 BC
Bronze
W 13.7 cm
National Museum of Afghanistan
MK 04.42.6

04.42.6. Courtyard of the temple with indented niches; last occupation level, around 145 BC. Cast and engraved bronze. Max. width 13.7 cm; height of the busts 4.6 cm.

Handle of a large dish or bowl, in the form of a flattened arch, whose attachments to the vessel are two vine leaves serving as background to a pair of female busts. The faces, with their coarse features, huge eyes, wide straight mouths and thick noses, are unattractive. The triangular ears, disproportionately large, with small incisions around the edges, are without any doubt animal in nature. They had been initially mistaken for a leafy decorative element.

Around the forehead the hair forms large, finely grooved waves, while two large falling locks undulate over the rounded shoulders. From the hair, almost on top of the head, emerge two big conical horns with horizontal grooving (a pattern perhaps clumsily imitating the spiralling horns of caprine animals), which, like the ears, link these females to the animal world. The busts are covered with stiffly folded cloaks, set off by a border engraved with a herringbone motif. This garment appears to be made from



animal skin rather than fabric. One of the breasts, its nipple marked by a circular incision, is left uncovered. The vine leaves, on which the veins have been indicated, are covered with small dots. The tubular handle has a bulbous annulus at its midpoint; a leafy branch is engraved on the exterior of the handle.

The Dionysiac nature of the image, immediately suggested by the vine leaves, goes further than the normal depiction of maenads. These are generally recognised by their animal skin garb, an exposed breast, tangled hair, sometimes crowned with vine leaves, and sometimes, more explicitly, inebriated, with an ecstatic expression on the face or closed eyes. With the handle from Ai Khanum we are immersed in a more primitive peasant world, where the female followers of the god of wine, endowed with pointed ears and horns, have not yet entirely shaken off their animal nature: more satyresses than maenads. Satyrs, with large animal ears, are not absent from the Hellenistic iconography of Central Asia, such as those one can see gambolling on the famous ivory *rhytons*

of Nisa. But they are seldom horned, as if the artists thought that their large, bald foreheads and their animal ears were enough to make them easily recognizable (Masson – Pugačenkova 1982, *passim*). Their female companions are characterised, together with the fawn skin they wear, by their dancing. Normally the Greeks did not make any attempt at bestialising the faces of these female savages, but here, in faraway Bactria, Hellenism was under pressure from foreign popular traditions. This iconographical peculiarity sets apart the handle from Ai Khanum from other evidence of Dionysiac character in Hellenistic Central Asia. Before their animal attributes had been recognized as such, the Ai Khanum maenads had been closely linked to a group of three bronze handles of the same type found by chance in 1958 in the area of the Indo-Greek archaeological site of Charsadda, near Peshawar, in Pakistan: see Coarelli 1966, pp. 94, 108, fig. 1, 9. They represent a female bust, clad in a cloak and holding an ear of corn. This comparison is now no longer convincing. The style of the Charsadda handles is closer to models from the

Mediterranean region, and their date is also far later (second to third century AD). Found in the courtyard of the temple with indented niches, in the layer associated with the 'squatter' reoccupation (cf. pp. 54-55), the handle from Ai Khanum cannot be later than 150-145 BC. Its style, already strongly provincialised, should rather be compared to a female head on a bronze appliqué from Takht-i-Sangin in Tajikistan, made in a workshop which, at around the same period, also betrays a disintegrating Hellenism (Litvinsky - Pichikyan 1981, no. 221, colour plate p. 78).

Coarelli 1966, pp. 94-108, fig. 1-9

Bernard 1974, p. 302, fig. 13

Litvinsky - Pichikyan 1981, p. 215, fig. 20

Masson - Pugacenkova 1982

Francfort 1984, pp. 56-57 (no. 27), tab. 20 (no. 27),

pl. XX/27.

Catalogue Dushanbe 1985

14 Statuette of Heracles

Afghanistan, Ai Khanum,
Sanctuary of the temple
with indented niches

150 BC

Bronze

H 18.2 cm

National Museum of Afghanistan

MK 04.42.8

Late period: around 150 BC.

Total height 18.2 cm; base: 7.2 x 5.3 cm, height
2.5 cm.

The left leg has been summarily repaired. The foot, which had been broken off, was joined to the lower leg by a metal pin replacing the ankle. The base, separately cast and hollow (wall thickness 1.5-2 mm), left open underneath, included two holes for the feet. During the repair the small pegs under the feet were reinserted in the holes and secured in them with molten lead. But the hasty repair fixed the feet higher than the base (by 5 mm) and the right one protruded slightly from it. The base fits the feet so badly that it is perhaps not the original one.

A beardless Heracles stands on a high base, his weight on his right leg. He holds in his left hand a club that rests against his upper left arm. With his right hand he places a crown of leaves on his head. This statue is poorly cast, with the upper part of the thighs below the crotch fused together. The style is rustic, heavy, with a disproportionately short and massive



trunk, arms without muscles and enormous hands, in particular the left hand which doesn't quite grasp the club. This type of standing youthful Heracles, placing a crown on his own head, is represented in a similar way, but in masterly style, on Graeco-Bactrian coins of King Demetrius (190-175 BC), with the addition of a lion skin over the left arm (Bopearachchi 1991, pl. 4-5), a pose later imitated by the Indo-Greek Kings Lysias (120-110 BC) (*ibid.*, pl. 38-39) and Theophilos (around 90 BC) (*ibid.*, pl. 48). Together with the inscription in the *gymnasium*, this statuette bears witness to the enormous popularity of the worship of this hero in Greek Central Asia and throughout the Hellenised east (Downey 1969, *passim*).

Downey 1969
Bernard 1974, p. 302, fig. 13
Bopearachchi 1991

15 Moon crescent with a human head

Afghanistan, Ai Khanum,
Sanctuary of the temple
with indented niches
Before 145 BC
Bronze
W 14 cm
National Museum of Afghanistan
MK 04.42.10

04.42.10. Sanctuary of the temple with indented niches, room 29, late occupation level. Width between the finials 14 cm; height 12.5 cm; height of the appliqué 5 cm; width 5 cm. Large moon crescent in cast bronze, with small finials at the pointed extremities. A hollow image of a human head is attached in the centre by three rivets, the hollow interior being filled with lead. The head (probably, but not certainly, male), in full frontal view, has elongated oval features, with a stern expression. Under the chin there seems to be a beard. The style is of good quality, so far as this can be judged given the condition of the appliqué, which has deteriorated since its discovery. The voluminous compact mass surrounding



the head and descending further down than the chin surely cannot be interpreted as a hairstyle, even if there are here and there traces of curly tufts. More probably it is a head covering, perhaps made of some sort of animal mane or skin. To either side of the appliqué the crescent is decorated with an engraved vegetal tendril, which undulates up to the finials. It is difficult to say if this decoration was applied when the crescent was initially made or subsequently, when the head was added, in that case it is an addition.

In the middle of the lower edge of the back were found heavily corroded remnants of a rectangular iron plate (?), possibly intended as an attachment to a vertical shaft. In that event the crescent could be some kind of religious insignia. The poor condition of the central appliqué, whose details are difficult to understand, makes any speculation on the figure's identity hazardous. There is, of course, some

reason to associate the object with a moon cult, but no comparable representation of a moon god similar to the head of the appliqué is known either in Greece or in the East. One should, however, remember that, in contrast to the case in the Greek world, the moon deity in the East is male.

Just like the disc depicting Cybele (cat. no. 23), the moon crescent was discovered in the later occupation layer in the sanctuary, which by that time had been converted to domestic use by the local population, who collected together materials there from all over the city that the Greek colonists had abandoned. The object could therefore have been looted from some other place and does not necessarily provide us with information about the religious practices in the temple.

Francfort 1984, pp. 57-58, pl. XX/28, tab. 20, pl. 20/28

Female figurine

Afghanistan, Ai Khanum,
Sanctuary of the temple
with indented niches
Before 145 BC
Bone
16.2 x 3.4 cm
National Museum of Afghanistan
MK 04.42.11

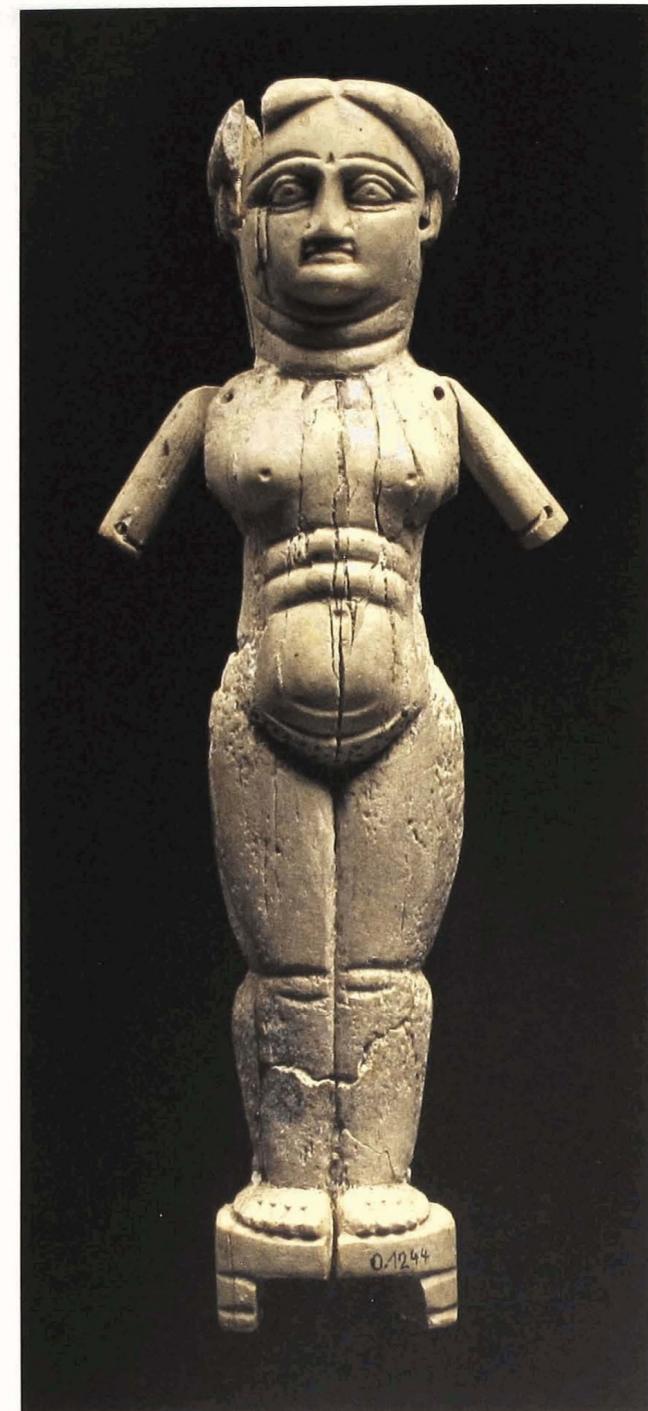
This statuette was discovered in the northerly room no. 33 in the sanctuary of the temple with indented niches, in the post-Greek occupation level, dating to shortly after 145 BC.

Height: 16.2 cm; max. width (hips) 3.2 cm; depth 2.8 cm.

The statuette was carved from a long section of bone, open at both ends¹. The breasts and shoulders are cut off vertically at the sides and a vertical slot 3 cm long, 1.6 cm high and 0.5 cm wide has been cut there transversely from breast to breast, extending above to the base of the neck. A plate of bone, now lost, must originally have been inserted in this slot so that its sides would protrude enough for the arms, made separately, to be attached to it. The figurine has been erroneously restored (and photographed) with two moveable arms hinged directly on the edges of the slot: the two tiny holes at opposite sides of the slot, both to the front and to the rear, must have been made to fix the bone plate in the slot by pins, not to attach the arms to the figurine. In the correct arrangement with the plate in the slot, the articulated arms could not be moved by means of a thread pulled through the central cavity, as was previously suggested. In any case, the two upper arms which were found in the same location and restored as parts of the body seem too small for it: they belong to some other bone statuette; for another exemplar, more feminine in appearance, which was found in the same area of the sanctuary of the temple with indented niches see Francfort 1984, tab. 5/11 (01113), pl. 5.

Remnants of red paint (on the tips of the breasts, lips and forehead) and black paint (alternating red and black necklace pendants, pubis) are visible.

The nude woman is shown frontally in a hieratically rigid pose, the legs stiffly pressed together, separated only by an engraved line. This astonishing and crudely explicit rendering of a fertility idol, with its heavy and fat body, an enormous neck with folds of flesh, and an oversized *mons veneris*, symbol of sexual power, covering the whole groin, embodies



a type of naked mother goddess which is not very frequent even during the Greek period in Central Asia, where there was a clear preference for clothed feminine deities². Like the body itself, the features of the face are rudely stylised, with harshly incised eyes, eyebrows and mouth; the ears are pierced for jewellery. The hair, short and smooth, probably originally painted, forms a roll above the forehead. A necklace with pendants and a coloured dot between the eyebrows in the Indian fashion

play with the nakedness. The pedestal on which the goddess stands is unusual, clearly a stool, of the Greek type, normally used as a footrest. Miniature stools in stone, with an added round torus, each around 10 centimetres in height, along with other types of small pedestals (Francfort 1984, pl. XXXVI-XXXVII), were found in abundance in shrines and private houses. They were certainly used as stands but we do not know for what objects. Without any parallel in the Greek world, they are one of

the many riddles at Ai Khanum.

Although the characters of its femininity were ritually overemphasised to the point of becoming grotesque, this nude statuette of a goddess was nevertheless intended to represent the canons of oriental feminine beauty.

Bernard 1974, pp. 302, 305, fig. 15
Francfort 1984, tab. 5/31, pp. 16-17/31, pl. V

¹ The summit of the head, now open, must have been originally closed by some device.

² For a bone figurine of a naked goddess from the Graeco-Bactrian layers of Termez, also with the breasts cut off laterally and hinged arms, see Sh. Pidaev, *Obshchestvennye nauki v Uzbekistane* [The social sciences in Uzbekistan] 1986, 9, pp. 40-42.

17 Decorative plate with stylised vegetal motives

Afghanistan, Ai Khanum,
Temple with indented niches
Early 3rd century BC
Bronze
44 x 42 cm
National Museum of Afghanistan
MK 04.42.12

This bronze plate, possibly repoussé, has been reconstructed out of numerous fragments. It was damaged by the fierce fire that destroyed the temple and was found in the destruction layer of its vestibule (room 3).

It is a cruciform decorative appliqué, probably for one of the two doors of the temple, with four equal, triangular arms rounded at the angles: maximum length 44 cm. A circular central opening, diam. 5.5 cm, with its slightly protruding edge upturned, was fitted with a door knob. The arms are decorated with a flower bud sprouting from two curved leaves tied at their base by a triple binding, while their stems curve outwards, their junction being marked by a short two-branched stalk. A second bronze plate, found in the same location, but circular in form, probably with a similar round opening in the centre, has a somewhat more elaborate decoration made of a continuous frieze, where similar buds alternate with palmettes sprouting from a blooming calyx (Francfort 1984, tab. 20/29 b = 402-405, pl. 4, 21 and XXII). The archaic style of these plates, compared by Francfort to paintings and glazed brick panels in Assyrian and Babylonian palaces in Mesopotamia, and to products of Achaemenid art, sets these plates apart from the Hellenistic decorative syntax



normally in use at Ai Khanum. Are they neo-Assyrian or Achaemenid originals brought from the Middle East, or imitations made in Bactria sometime between the ninth and fourth century, as it has been suggested?

A more straightforward explanation is offered by the influence of the Achaemenid artistic tradition, itself the heir to neo-Assyrian art, which must have remained very strong (see the so-called treasures of the Oxus and of Mir Zakah II), especially in the local workshops, during the initial period after the Greek conquest, as demonstrated by some other finds from Ai Khanum.

These decorative facings could have been made for the wooden doors of the first temple which preceded the temple with the indented niches, and reused in the reconstruction.

Francfort 1984, pp. 58-59, tab. 20/29a, pl. 21 (no. 29a),
pl. XXII/29a; cf. pl. 4



18 **Stone caskets,
pyxids**

Afghanistan, Ai Khanum,
Sanctuary of the temple
with indented niches

Before 145 BC

Schist

Ø 5.9 to 18 cm

National Museum of Afghanistan
MK 04.42.397

19 **Stone caskets,
pyxids**

Afghanistan, Ai Khanum,
Sanctuary of the temple
with indented niches

Before 145 BC

Schist

Ø 5.9 to 18 cm

National Museum of Afghanistan
MK 04.42.398

20 > **Stone caskets and lids
pyxids**

Afghanistan, Ai Khanum,
Sanctuary of the temple
with indented niches

Before 145 BC

Schist

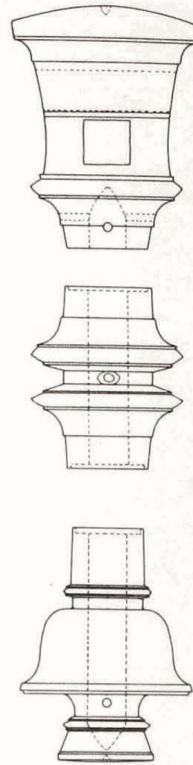
Ø 4.3 to 26.5 cm

National Museum of Afghanistan
MK 05.42.229



The local workshops produced a large number of these objects, which were carved from a greyish, more rarely bluish schist, obtained from the mountains of Afghanistan, and which were found everywhere on the site. They are hemispherical boxes, with a slightly flattened bottom. Inside they are generally divided into two, three or four compartments by thin dividers, spreading out from a central circular cavity. The lip is flat and has on its inner side a fillet in relief which helps maintain the lid in place. The slightly convex lid has a mushroom-shaped knob which was glued or pinned in place. The lids most often display a decoration that is engraved or with inlays of coloured ceramic plaques or both. The engraved decoration consists of simple geometric patterns – triangles, rectangles, circles, bars etc. – and plant or animal motifs, which consist of leafy branches, rosettes, suns, horses and ibexes, and are treated in a linear stylised manner, which evokes rock-engravings. The inlay decoration, which plays on the contrast between the dark stone and the vivid colours of the incrustations (black,





yellow, red), is purely geometric. The diameter varies between 38 and 27 cm, 10-20 cm being the most common size.

The small Greek caskets known as *pyxis* (sing.), *pyxides* (plur.), round or square, rarely in stone, are often divided into compartments, but the systematic manufacture of their Graeco-Bactrian counterparts using stone fashioned on a lathe and the engraved or inlaid decoration are characteristic of the local craft industry. The carving of hard stones for vessels and various objects and the use of inlays for decoration goes back to an ancient Bactrian tradition of the Bronze Age.

These caskets, undoubtedly used by women for all kinds of purposes (cosmetics, jewellery etc.), were widely circulated and came to serve as a model for a type of spherical Buddhist reliquary very common in the Gandhara area.

Francfort 1984, pp. 21-29, pl. IX-XIII, 14-15
Guillaume - Rougeulle 1987, pp. 9-12, pl. 4-6, pl. II-III

21 ▲ Fragment of a throne leg

Afghanistan, Ai Khanum,
Temple with indented niches
Before 145 BC
Ivory
H 10.7 cm
National Museum of Afghanistan
MK 05.42.582

22 ▲ Fragment of a throne leg

Afghanistan, Ai Khanum,
Temple with indented niches
Before 145 BC
Ivory
H 13.8 cm
National Museum of Afghanistan
MK 05.42.583

These two pieces, made of two ivory sections, are parts of the legs of a backless seat found in the burned debris of the vestibule of the temple. Each leg originally consisted of three cylindrical ivory parts, carved from sections of elephant tusks, whose mouldings were turned on a lathe. The three parts were connected by wooden spacers (now lost), and axial pegs, themselves probably made of wood (see drawing), which fastened the sections together one above the other. In each ivory section one or

two small horizontal cylindrical holes received pins which fixed it to the vertical peg. The upper part also has two rectangular holes for the seat's own transverse struts. The reconstructed height of the whole is around 50 cm. Nine of the twelve parts comprising the four legs of the seat have been found. They were then in fairly good condition, but have since seriously deteriorated. Only the middle and lowest parts of one leg have been included in the exhibition.

The reconstructed dimensions of the best-preserved examples are:

1. Upper part (not exhibited): height 14 cm. Cylindrical section, with slightly concave sides, widening upwards, where it ends in a convex top, and forming below a discoidal moulding. Underneath, a shallow vertical orifice for a wooden peg connecting the upper part with the middle one. In the cylindrical section, two square holes (c. 2.5 x 2.5 cm) at right angles for the horizontal struts of the seat. Under the disc, two small horizontal holes to fasten a pin fixing the upper part to the vertical peg.
2. Central part 905.42.582 (Francfort 1984, p. 9, tab. 1/26 (02149), pl. II): height 11 cm; upper diameter 4.9 cm, lower diameter 4.4 cm.

Moulding forming two discs between two cylindrical sections; longitudinal vertical orifice (diam. 2 cm) for a wooden peg connecting the central part with the upper and lower ones; between the discs two small horizontal holes (diam. 0.8 cm) for pins fixing the central part to the vertical peg.

3. Lower part (05.42.583; *ibid.*, p. 9, tab. 1/7 (0357), pl. II); height 13.8 cm; diameter of the base of the leg 5.8 cm. From top to bottom: lower part of the cylindrical spacer of the leg with a small ring in relief; a large bell-shaped moulding; and a truncated support cone, with two rings in relief; between the last two a small horizontal hole for a pin fixing the lower element to the axial peg.

This type of Greek seat was not uncommon at the time, but few examples have survived (Bernard 1970 B, pp. 327-343). It spread in the East in the wake of the Greek colonisation: compare the wooden tomb bed with silver fittings from Frehat en-Nufegi, in the area of Uruk-Warka (first century AD), several beautiful examples from Hellenistic Central Asia found at the ancient Parthian capital Nisa, and a wooden example from Taxila with bronze fittings, already showing signs of Indian influence.

The proximity of India was undoubtedly a decisive factor in the development of an exceptionally active ivory industry in Bactria, much evidence of which has been found at Ai Khanum.

Bernard 1970 B
Francfort 1984



23 Silver plate with a representation of Cybele

Afghanistan, Ai Khanum,
Temple with indented niches
3rd century BC
Gilded silver
Ø 25 cm
National Museum of Afghanistan
MK 04.42.7

Circular silver plate 25 cm in diameter and 1-2 mm thick, with a curved rim, originally nailed to a wooden disc, from which it was violently torn off when looted. The silver has virtually all mineralised and turned into a thin layer of silver chloride and silver hydroxide. The plate was worked by the embossment technique and gilded with gold leaf 10-15 thousandths of a millimetre thick.

Cybele, the Greek goddess of nature, is represented frontally, her head crowned with a cylindrical *polos* (special head covering) as a symbol of her godly status. She rides through her beloved mountain domain in a chariot drawn by two lions. Beside her stands the winged goddess Nike, the body also shown frontally but the head in profile. She grasps a goad and the reins in her hands, and drives the team forward through a rocky landscape strewn with small blooming flowers. She is attended by two of her priests wearing the ritual garb of the servants of the goddess: the *tunica talaris*, a long robe, held by a wide girdle tied three times around the waist, and a conical hat. One of the priests walks briskly behind the chariot, his back and his head tilted back, on tiptoe so as to better hold aloft a heavy, broad parasol above the goddess. The other priest stands opposite the chariot, on a high-stepped altar, built of six tall blocks of stone, making an offering. He burns incense in a small censer (*thymiaiterion*). Three heavenly bodies shine down from the sky: the sun in the guise of a bust of the god Helios with a nimbus of rays around his head¹, the moon crescent and a star with multiple rays. The object is typical of hybrid Graeco-oriental art, particularly in its iconography. Cybele in her chariot drawn by lions is a motif from the Greek Mediterranean and Asia Minor, where her cult had spread from Phrygia. The winged Nike, personified as a charioteer and clad in a long robe tied high under the breasts, embodies the Greek symbol of Victory. The priests' garments, though of a distinctly eastern character reflecting the oriental origin of the cult, were also worn in the Greek

and Roman world, where they were felt, nevertheless, as being of exotic character. By contrast, the typically eastern elements include the priest with the parasol (a royal symbol) walking behind the chariot, the bare feet of the two priests (a symbol of ritual purity in the Orient), the chariot with its large wheels and high railing, resembling Achaemenid chariots, and the altar with its high steps, comparable examples of which are known from Dura-Europos (in Syria) and Pasargadae (in Iran). Even the stark differentiation between everything partaking of a divine nature, distinguished by gilding (Cybele and Nike, the sacred mountains, the goddess's chariot, her lions, the heavenly sky) and the simple human nature of the priests left ungilded seems to emanate from a kind of oriental dualism. On the other hand the types and drapery of the feminine garments worn by Cybele and Nike, as well as Helios tightly wrapped in his coat, the hairstyles of the goddess and her attendant, the ostentatiously parading lions, one paw raised, the finely observed and rendered posture of the priest tiptoeing and arching his back to better hold up over the goddess the parasol he is carrying, all this was inspired by the western tradition. In strong contrast, the flat juxtaposition, without overlapping, of the different elements of the composition, resulting in the absence of any perspective, the figures shown either frontally or in profile without any attempt at three-quarter views (except for the bust of Helios), and the rigidity of the attitudes, particularly that of the goddess Cybele, who resembles an idol ceremonially carried in procession, accentuate the oriental character.

Although the object was found in one of the sacristies, it is far from certain that it belonged to the temple. In fact the silver plate had been hidden under the floor of the southern sacristy some time before the second and final invasion of nomads (Yuezhi) by one of the 'squatters' who, after the first nomadic assault (Sakas), had desecrated the temple and made it a storage place (see pp. 54-55). It could therefore have been picked up anywhere on the site before being deposited in the temple.

There is nothing in this plate that carries the imprint of a truly Hellenistic style. On the contrary its very conservative character points to classical fourth century models and make it more or less contemporary to the foundation of the city (around 300 BC), or even a little earlier, in the last quarter of the fourth century, before



the foundation of Ai Khanum where it would have been brought somewhat later. In any case its presence in Bactria cannot predate the Greek conquest, for there is no evidence whatsoever that the cult of Cybele had spread to Iran and Central Asia by the time of the Achaemenid dominion.

Small fragments of a silver medallion that were found in the Bactrian Oxus sanctuary at Takht-i-Sangin, around 100 km downstream from Ai Khanum, show, treated in a similar style, the

neck of a harnessed lion with its paw on a mountainous terrain and a wheel, probably remnants of another plate with the same subject from the same local workshop (Pičikjan 1991, pp. 103-105, fig. 19; Pichikyan 1992, pp. 51-52, fig. 28). The date at the end of the Achaemenid period attributed to this find by I.R. Pichikyan, the Russian archaeologist who excavated at Takht-i-Sangin, must be regarded as provisional.

The initial restoration to ensure the preservation of the silver plate took place in 1970

in the Laboratoire d'archéologie des métaux in Jarville, France, under the direction of A France-Lanord (report drafted by him dated 1 September 1970).

Bernard 1970 A, pp. 339-347
Francfort 1984, pp. 93-104, pl. XLI
Pičikjan 1991
Pichikyan 1992

¹ The moon crescent can also symbolise the heavenly vault.



The southeastern citadel

24 Corinthian capital

Afghanistan, Ai Khanum

Before 145 BC

Limestone

H 74 cm

National Museum of Afghanistan

MK 06.42.640

Height: 74m, with central circular socket 12 cm diam, depth 12 cm.

This column capital was excavated from the citadel, a triangular promontory of 160 x 120 m at the southeastern corner of the acropolis, which overhangs the river Kokcha on a steep cliff 80 m high. It surfaced when soldiers from Ahmad Shah Massoud's Northern Alliance

were installing heavy artillery there directed against the Taliban, who occupied the left bank of the Kokcha. It was recently taken to Kabul by the DAFA.

This capital must have come from an important building, either a temple which would have stood within the defensive perimeter of the promontory, like the Parthenon on the Acropolis of Athens, or the residence of the military governor. The excavations in this sector of the citadel were confined to a section of the encircling rampart, so that the building itself went unnoticed. Judging from the good condition of the capital, this construction must be fairly well preserved despite the fact that the Kushan dynasty and the Timurids later sporadically reoccupied the citadel (Leriche 1986, pp. 9-25, pl. 2-6).

Apart from some small cracks the capital is virtually intact: a fine compensation for the destruction by the modern pillagers of almost all the examples uncovered during the excavations in the lower town, with the exception of a few, displaced and reused as supports for the roof of a *chaikhana* or teahouse in the village of Khwaja Baudin, not far from Ai Khanum, the place where Ahmad Shah Massoud was assassinated in 2001.

Most capitals from Ai Khanum, including the present example and the one from Bactra also exhibited here (cat. no. 4), are of the so-called 'free' Corinthian type, whose best representatives are the interior capitals of the famous *Tholos* ('round building') of Epidaurus in Greece, where the spiral volutes spring directly from the crown of acanthus leaves, in contrast to the

so-called 'normal' Corinthian type, where the volutes emerge from a thick grooved stem above the acanthus leaves, as on the capitals of the Olympieion at Athens. The Ai Khanum capital has four rows of acanthus, with, respectively from bottom to top, 4 + 8 + 8 + 4 leaves, alternating from row to row.

While the capitals from Ai Khanum belong formally to the 'free' Corinthian type, they have nevertheless very distinctive features which differentiate them from their Greek counterparts: the ascending part of the angle volutes is extraordinarily wide and massive, and partly overlapped by the spirals of their upper end terminating around a large protruding eye; on each of the four sides the large triangular space between the angle volutes is left empty, without the pair of smaller interior volutes which one finds at that place on the Greek exemplars; this amorphous, slightly concave surface has lost any structural function, while the Greek specimens and the capital from Bactra display, at that place, the rounded surface of an inverted cone, which, emerging from underneath the external decoration, plays the role of a real bracket sustaining the roof.

This original variant of the Corinthian order was created by architects who worked for the Seleucid kings in Syria-Mesopotamia at the beginning of the third century BC and who took their inspiration from an ancient type of Greek and near eastern capital with ascending volutes, called Aeolic, which they 'Hellenised' by means of the Greek acanthus. The leaves in high relief, boldly detached from the background, with strongly curved ends, displaying fleshy and luxuriant forms, are typical of these Graeco-Bactrian capitals, whose vigour and leafy exuberance prevail over elegance.

Bernard 1968, pp. 129-140

Bernard 1973, pp. 19, 32, pl. 23, 37

Leriche 1986



The palace

25 Antefix with palmette, early type

Afghanistan, Ai Khanum, Palace

3rd century BC

Terracotta

36 x 18 x 16.5 cm

National Museum of Afghanistan

MK 05.42.84/1



26 Antefixes with palmettes

Afghanistan, Ai Khanum,
Palace
3rd-2nd century BC
Terracotta
35 x 16 x 17 cm
National Museum of Afghanistan
MK 05.42.84/12-19

27 Winged antefix

Afghanistan, Ai Khanum,
Palace, Main entrance
3rd-2nd century BC
Terracotta
50 x 42 x 8 cm
National Museum of Afghanistan
MK 05.42.84/1



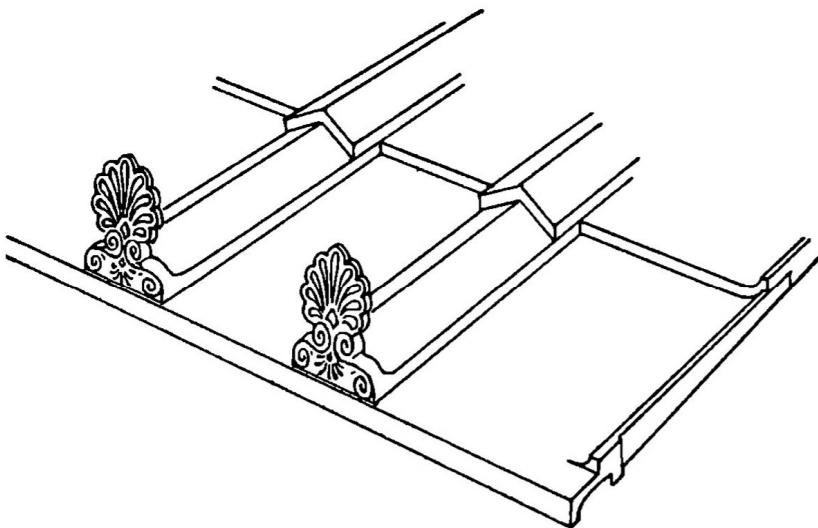
28 **Antefixes with palmettes**

Afghanistan, Ai Khanum,
3rd-2nd century BC
Terracotta
28 x 19 cm
National Museum of Afghanistan
MK 05.42.84/2-8

Antefixes

In Graeco-Bactrian architecture, as in general in the Orient, the roofs had only one slope and not two as was customary in classical architecture. Another major difference: the roofs were not covered with terracotta tiles but made of earth. The ceiling of reed-mats supported by the beams was covered with a mattress of freshly cut reeds over which a thick layer of earth was spread; this was made watertight by a thick lining of a mixture of clay and straw. The gentle slope of this last protective layer was carefully calculated so that the rainwater neither stagnated nor ran down too quickly, washing away the lining of clay. At Ai Khanum, as was also probably the case in Graeco-Bactrian architecture in general, in the buildings of any importance, that is to say the public buildings, including the palace, and the patrician private mansions, the top layer of clay was reinforced along the edge of the roofs with one or two rows of typically Greek terracotta flat tiles of the so-called Corinthian type, which protected the edge of the roof from erosion by rain water. At the same time the narrow cover-tiles of the pentagonal section which were placed over the lateral joints between the main tiles to prevent rain infiltration had, attached to their front, decorative plates ornamented with motifs in relief, most frequently but not exclusively palmettes. These so-called 'antefixes' represent another typically Greek system of architectural decoration.





A) Antefixes with palmettes

The antefixes with palmettes exhibited here draw on two main models, the first of which has a long history.

Type I

Cat. no. 28c: The original palmette had an attractive elongated shape with sharp contours, slender leaves with sharp edges, and a narrow base with a flat profile: height 35 cm; width 17.5 cm; width of base 16.5 cm. According to the Greek system, the antefix was stuck to the pentagonal cover-tile with which it formed one piece.

Cat. no. 26b (Garczynski 1980, p. 43, pl. XVI): The leaves gradually became thicker, the contours less sharp, the forms less precise. The ultimate outcome of this degeneration is evident in the flabby palmettes of the palace courtyard with Doric columns (example cat. no. 26b), dating from the last period of the Greek city (second quarter of the second century BC). This stylistic development was accompanied by a technical change. The antefix was fashioned and fired separately from the cover-tile. The plate was provided with a horizontal triangular peg protruding from the lower part of the rear, which was inserted in the pentagonal front opening of the cover-tile. This change was probably motivated by the fact that to fire both the cover-tile and the antefix glued together

in the oven as an ensemble was in itself a risky operation, leaving the antefix eminently fragile and prone to break away easily from the cover-tile, as demonstrated by the fact that the two constituent parts were always discovered separately. But the new technical system, to which the Graeco-Bactrian architects resorted, was not very effective either, for the back-pegs themselves broke easily from the antefix-plates. Among the tens of antefixes recovered from the excavations only one exemplar was discovered still attached to its unbroken peg.

Bernard 1973, p. 93, pl. 101 a
Garczynski 1980
Guillaume 1983, p. 39, pl. 24 E, F, G

Type II

Cat. no. 28c

Despite the obvious affinity with type I, type II was not derived from it, but created independently. The palmette is more bulky, less high (27 cm), and somewhat broader (18.5 cm); the leaves are closer to each other; the arched motif at the base of the palmette is almost flat.

There is no indication of a real evolution of this type, and it does not seem to have had a long existence.

Bernard 1973, p. 93, pl. 101 b
Guillaume 1983, p. 39, pl. 24 c

B) Winged antefixes

Cat. no. 27

Height 48.5 cm. Maximal width of the lower leaves 41.5 cm; maximal width of the wings 38.5 cm. Width of the base 21.5 cm, thickness 5.5 cm. Like the antefixes of type II it was fixed at the rear by a peg which could be stuck into a corresponding cover-tile.

This type of antefix is characterised by a pair of wings combined with vegetal motifs. The composition is dominated by the two large wings, outstretched like unfurled banners, whose lower part is made of four to five double rows of short horizontal feathers, while the upper part comprises three rows of long thin feathers strongly curving inward like sickle blades. At the base the wings join up with a sort of collar with three large hanging flower buds, perhaps lotus blossoms, flanked by two small umbrella-like flowers on long stems. Above the 'collar', between the two wings, is a long bulbous pistil, with its point merging into another smaller pistil, and two other umbrella-like flowers on either side (the upper pistil and the flowers are missing on the exhibited example). Under the pendant collar two thick leaves or petals with out-turned extremities form an open calyx for the whole composition, which sits on a profiled base consisting of two convex mouldings framing a groove.

The outside façade of the main entrance to the palace was decorated with this type of antefix. The highly unusual hybrid composition of animal and vegetal motifs is unique, and unknown from the Greek repertoire. But its powerful assertiveness and monumentality compensate for whatever it lacks in elegance and good taste.

Bernard 1965, pp. 645-654, fig. 34-36
Bernard 1973, pp. 14-15, 22, fig. 2, pl. 100



The funerary monument of Kineas

29 Base for a stele inscribed with the Delphic maxims

Afghanistan, Ai Khanum,
The funerary monument of Kineas
Beginning of 3rd century BC
Limestone
65.5 x 46.5 cm; h 28 cm
Socket for insertion of the stele peg: 26 x 20 cm,
depth 15 cm.
National Museum Afghanistan
MK 05.42.13

30 Lower left corner of the stele with Delphic maxims

Afghanistan, Ai Khanum,
The funerary monument of Kineas
Beginning of 3rd century BC
Limestone
14 x 15 cm
National Museum of Afghanistan
MK 05.42.190

The upper edges are bevelled off at the front and sides. The stone served as the base of a stele which was in the same material, and upon which were engraved the approximately one hundred and fifty maxims said to have been presented to Apollo at his sanctuary in Delphi



by the famed Seven Sages of ancient Greece formulating the rules to be complied with by a Greek in his private life and as a citizen. They constitute a collection of brief exhortations for daily life, often rather prosaic in tone and primarily aiming at societal harmony:

'take a wife'; 'exercise authority over your wife'; 'honour your parents', 'speak well of everyone'; 'strive for unanimity'. Some of the sayings contained more elevated thoughts: 'know thyself', 'nothing in excess'; 'die for the fatherland'. The lower left corner of the stele, the only part preserved, includes the start of the maxim 'practice wisdom', the forty-eighth on a complete list which has been preserved in manuscript form. Thanks to that manuscript we know that the whole series of maxims was shown on the stele of Ai Khanum, extending over three columns. For lack of space the last five sayings were engraved on the base, on its upper right hand part, forcing the engraver to push to the left the dedicatory poem by the man who had donated the copy of the Delphic maxims to the city. These last maxims formed a group apart for they enumerate the chief virtues to be cultivated by a Greek man during the different phases of his life: 'As a child, learn good manners/as a young man, learn to control your passions/in middle age, be just/in old age, give good advice/then die, without regret'. The man named Clearchus, who had donated this copy of the Delphic precepts to the town and had them engraved at the most sacred spot in the city, the sacred precinct of the founder by proxy of Ai Khanum, a certain Kineas (see pp. 50-51), mentions his own name in the four-line poem to the left of the maxims: 'These wise sayings of the illustrious men of old have been consecrated at the Sacred Pytho [the former name of the oracular sanctuary of Apollo at Delphi]. There Clearchus transcribed them carefully, coming here to display them so that they shine in such a distant place, in the sacred precinct of Kineas.' This Clearchus has generally been identified with a famed Greek philosopher from Soli, a disciple of Aristotle. We might describe him as a distant forerunner of social anthropologists. He immersed himself in the study of human behaviour and the moral rules which facilitate our social relations. This inspired him in his attempt to produce an authentic list of the Delphic aphorisms. He was also interested in the origins of religious thought, which he believed to come from the east: first expressed by Iranian Magi, then transmitted to the Indian philosophers, and via them to the Jews. This would explain his exploratory trip through Bactria and Ai Khanum and further on to northwest India, at the start of the third century BC, a time when these countries enjoyed peace and security

under Seleucus I north of the Hindu Kush (Aria, Bactria and Sogdiana), and the Indian Maurya dynasty south of the Hindu Kush (Arachosia, Indus valley).

For the civic and cultural meaning of the monument see pp. 50-51.

Robert 1968, pp. 421-457, included in Bernard 1973, pp. 211-237

Bernard 2002, pp. 75-78

Lerner 2003-2004, pp. 373-409

Canali de Rossi 2004, nos. 382-4

Merkelbach - Stauber 2005, no. 103 A-B, pp. 8-15

The gymnasium

31 Hemispherical sundial

Afghanistan, Ai Khanum,
Gymnasium
Before 145 BC
Limestone
37.3 x 52 cm
National Museum of Afghanistan
MK 05.42.54

This sundial is a reconstruction based on eight fragments. The instrument was carved from a block of limestone and takes the form of a throne supported by two lion legs in front. The seat of the throne forms the dial face, a section of a hemisphere. Seven month curves are inscribed on the dial face, together with eleven diagonal hour lines, along which travels the lengthening and shortening shadow created by the metal rod, now lost, of the *gnomon* or style.

At the summer and winter solstices the shadow reaches the two outermost curves, while at the spring and autumn equinoxes it is on the central line. The horizontal metal style was fixed at the rear using a claw with five pegs, the holes for which are still visible. The extremity of the style coincided with the theoretical centre of the sphere and its length was equivalent to its radius.

The inscribed curves show that this sundial was designed for a latitude between $38^{\circ} 28'$ and $35^{\circ} 51'$ north, values which include Ai Khanum ($37^{\circ} 10'$), with a margin of around 1° . This minor discrepancy had no significant consequences for its practical use for everyday life: the instrument was not intended to be a precision time-piece like our modern clocks.

The top of the left foot has been broken off and later reattached using three metal clamps, which were pulled out from their sockets when the *gymnasium* was looted. The repair, which was carried out in ancient times, shows that the instrument was considered to be valuable. It was manufactured with great care, as can be seen from the two lion paws which decorate the front and whose fur and protruding veins are realistically rendered.

This was the most widespread type of sundial in ancient times. It was described by Vitruvius (IX, 8, 1) as a *hemicyclium excavatum ex quadrato ad enclimaque succisum*, 'a hemisphere hollowed out of a cube, and cut in front following the inclination of the pole'. That is, the front of the block has been obliquely cut so that it makes



an angle with the earth's axis which is the equivalent of the latitude of the place where the sundial stands. The Chaldean priest Berossus (third century BC), born in Babylonia, and who wrote in Greek an history of ancient Babylonia for king Antiochus I, is said to have been the inventor of this type of sundial.

Veuve 1982, pp. 23-26

Veuve 1987, pp. 86-88

32 Hermaic pillar

Afghanistan, Ai Khanum,

Gymnasium

2nd century BC

Limestone

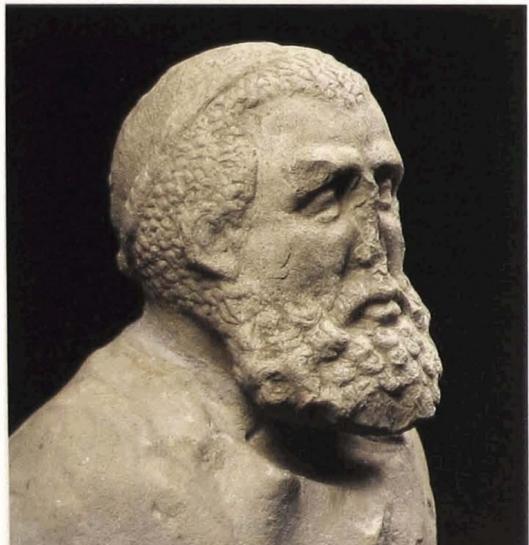
H 77 cm

National Museum of Afghanistan

MK 05.42.14

Bust 54.5 cm high and pillar 22.5 cm high, whose lower extremity forms an inverted cone which served as a peg to be inserted in a base now lost. The head discovered separately at the same spot was attached later. The pillar was found in the central niche in the *gymnasium's* northern colonnade.

It is a rectangular pillar with the bust of an old man with a beard, crowned with a fillet or headband. He is wrapped in a broad, heavy cloak which covers his arms. The right hand grasps the cloak from inside at the level of the stomach. The left arm extends forward a little, leaving the hand bare and holding a metal rod now lost. The drapery falls halfway down the



thighs where it ends horizontally. The broken nose and some superficial damage to the face do not detract from the quality of this sensitive portrait, revealing an artist with a quick and sure hand. He left unfinished parts which were not in full view (top of the skull, ears, back) to concentrate on marks of aging, discreetly suggested: the hair kept short in small flat and rigid curls, with already balding areas above the temples, the thinning of the flesh which has begun to hollow the temples and leaves the cheekbones slightly protruding; the somewhat myopic gaze through half-closed eyelids. The treatment of the drapery is not so felicitous: although the radiating folds determined by the grip on the material by the right hand are as might be expected, the monotonous horizontality of the lower edge of the cloak, the absence of consistency in the different movements of the drapery on the left side of the bust, and a kind of amorphousness in the rendering of the folds make one wonder whether the torso is the work of a pupil, less talented than the sculptor of the head.

This particular type of pillar with a human bust was a common type in Greek sculpture. A Hermaic pillar was originally a simple pillar with the head of a bearded Hermes and a phallus, used as a religious crossroad marker, Hermes being the protector of roads and entrances. However the Hermaic pillar acquired other characteristics as it gradually became associated with the activities of the gymnasias, for which Hermes as well as Heracles served as protectors. The heads increasingly took on the distinctive features of other gods and even of prominent personalities, as well as people who had played an important role in the activities of the gymnasias. Simultaneously with this development, there arose a tendency to replace the simple head by a bust, as is the case here. This bust is probably the portrait of a certain Strato, whose two sons, Triballo and Strato the Younger, are thought to have financed the rebuilding of the gymnasium, as can be deduced from the Greek inscription commemorating the dedication of the new building by them to Hermes and Heracles, which was engraved on a high pedestal which supported the base, now lost, in which the Hermaic pillar was inserted. The pedestal was found still in its place together with the Hermaic pillar, head included, in the same niche in the northern portico of the gymnasium. The elder Strato probably exercised the office of director of the

gymnasium (*gymnasiarch*), a position which brought with it considerable expenditure. This would explain why he was represented with a rod (made of metal and now lost) in his left hand, one of the insignia of his function, as well as the fillet crowning his head. According to the archaeological data, the dedication of the new building and of the Hermaic pillar must be dated to the early part of the second century BC. From a historical perspective this portrait marks a significant phase in the development of the Hermaic pillar, as it displays the transition between the type with the traditional head of the god Hermes and the type with the individualised portraits of honoured personalities.

Robert 1973, pp. 208-211, pl. 109 a
Bernard in: Veuve 1987, pp. 91-93, pl. 52-53; see also
pl. 19 c, e, f, inscription: *ibid.* pp. 28, 111-112

33 Cylindrical polar sundial

Afghanistan, Ai Khanum,
Gymnasium
Before 145 BC
Limestone
44.5 x 34.5 cm
National Museum of Afghanistan
MK 05.42.55

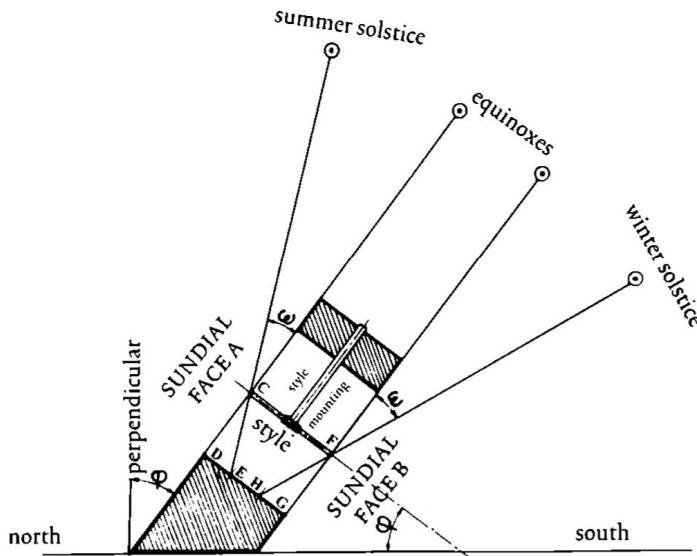
This instrument is made of a parallelepipedic block of limestone 44.5 cm long x 34.5 cm wide and 15 cm thick. One of the short sides, bevelled off, once stood on a horizontal base, now lost, to which it was fixed by a peg protruding from the bevelled edge. Once put up on its bevelled edge, the stone makes an angle of $37^{\circ} 4'$ with the vertical. A transverse cylindrical hole, 22 cm in diameter, perforates the block, at right angles to the main surfaces A and B. Two arcs of a circle are inscribed along both outer edges of the lower part of the cylinder, creating two curved strips. Hour lines are engraved transverse to these, dividing the strips into 12 sections. A 15 cm metal rod or *gnomon* (polar style), along the axis of the cylinder, throws a shadow which moves through this network of engraved lines to mark the passage of time. The gnomon was held in place by another metal rod fixed in a hole in the top of the block. All the metal elements were pulled out when the *gymnasium* was looted.

On its base the block was oriented in such a way that face A was to the north and face B to the south. The stone being inclined at $37^{\circ} 4'$ to the vertical, an inclination which closely

approximates the latitude of Ai Khanum ($37^{\circ} 10'$), the block was in a plane parallel to the equator, with the style oriented along the earth's axis. In this position the sunrays fell alternately on either surface A or B, depending on the season. At the spring and autumn equinoxes, when the declining light would be parallel to the inclination of the stone, the sun's rays would just graze the outer edges of the cylinder, so that the style would not throw a shadow on the inside. On all other days the sun would move back and forth through a span of about 24 degrees on either side of the equatorial plane and, depending on the season, the rays would enter the cylinder alternately through face A (spring-summer) and B (autumn-winter), ever more deeply, until the gnomon threw its shadow on the innermost curves of the strips (summer and winter solstices). Sundials functioned only during daytime. Unlike our clocks, the duration of daytime on sundials was always twelve hours, regardless of seasons, since the shade of the gnomon on the hour-network always went through the same twelve segments. But, contrary to our time reckoning which has only same-length hours, the length of the hours given by sundials varied with the seasons: long in summer, short in winter.

Among all ancient sundials, the Ai Khanum instrument is unique: it is the only type of cylindrical equatorial sundial that we know.





Among the different types of sundials Vitruvius mentions the *plinthium sive lacunar* or *plinthium cavatum* (IX, 8, 1). These names which evoke an instrument in the shape of a brick (*plinthium* in Latin, *plinthion* in Greek) with a cavity (*cavatum*) or the coffer of a ceiling (*lacunar*) with a central depression, would fit the Ai Khanum specimen pretty well.

This instrument betrays a significant discrepancy in the astronomical data which were used in its design. The hour lines within the cylinder are calculated for a latitude of around 23° , notably more to the south than Ai Khanum, while the inclination of the stone on its base has been calculated for a latitude of around 37° , which is the real latitude of the site. The result was that the time indicated by the sundial was some 20 minutes behind the real time of the Graeco-Bactrian city. It is unlikely that in a sundial displaying such originality and ingenuity of design such a big mistake of calculation could have been committed inadvertently by its designer. Looking more closely at the question, one cannot fail to notice that a latitude

of 23° north brings us close to ancient Syene, modern Aswan, Egypt (24°). This city had a conspicuous place in the history of ancient astronomy: Eratosthenes famously used the location and its distance from Alexandria to calculate the circumference of the earth. It cannot be ruled out that the difference in the time indicated by the hemispherical and the polar sundials, which both stood in the gymnasium, was used, through an example based on Syene, as evidence that the reading of time is correlated to the latitude. The Ai Khanum polar sundial must therefore be seen as a demonstration model for astronomy lessons, which would be appropriate in an educational establishment like a gymnasium.

In the same line of thought we may even wonder if the latitude of 23° which regulated the engraving of the hour lines on the polar sundial could not be also interpreted as that of the Indian city of Ujjain ($23^\circ 1'$), a place with the same significance for India as Syene had for the Greeks, and whose meridian served as a reference point for Indian astronomers. The

city that the Greeks knew by the name of 'Ozene, royal city of Tiastenes' (the Western Satrap Chastana) (Ptolemy VII, 1, 63) lay on an important route connecting ancient Barygaza (Bharuch) with the valleys of the Yamuna and Ganges rivers. It was already an important centre of the Maurya Empire in the third century BC when Ashoka lived there as viceroy. In the second century BC the Indo-Greeks of the Punjab and the Indus valley must have established contacts with the state of Ujjain. At the end of the same century an ambassador of the Indo-Greek king Antialcidas visited the sovereign of Vidisha, which is not very far from Ujjain, and dedicated to the god Vasudeva a monument which still bears his Greek name and that of his master. It could very well be that the Graeco-Bactrian astronomers of Ai Khanum knew Ujjain and that it, as well as Syene, had a special meaning for them because of the situation of the two places on the same Tropic of Cancer.

The discovery at Ai Khanum of this unique piece should give a fresh impulse to the study of exchanges between Greek and Indian astronomy. Thanks to the Greek colonisation of Central Asia, these may have started in the Hellenistic era, much earlier than previously thought. Graeco-Bactrian and Indo-Greek astronomers would thus have paved the way for the massive introduction of astronomical knowledge during the Roman period, to which the recently published *Yavanajataka* of Sphujidhvaja (third century AD), a Sanskrit translation from the Greek and the oldest known Indian writing on astronomy, bears vivid testimony.

Bernard 1976, pp. 299-302
 Janin 1978, pp. 357-362
 Rohr 1980, pp. 271-278
 Veuve 1982, pp. 36-54
 Veuve 1987, pp. 88-91

On sundials in classical times:
 Gibbs 1976
 Savoie 2007 A, pp. 344-349
 Savoie 2007 B

The Fountain of the Oxus

34 Water spout in the form of a theatrical mask

Afghanistan, Ai Khanum,
Fountain of the Oxus
2nd century BC
Limestone
21 x 40 x 19 cm
National Museum of Afghanistan
MK 05.42.17

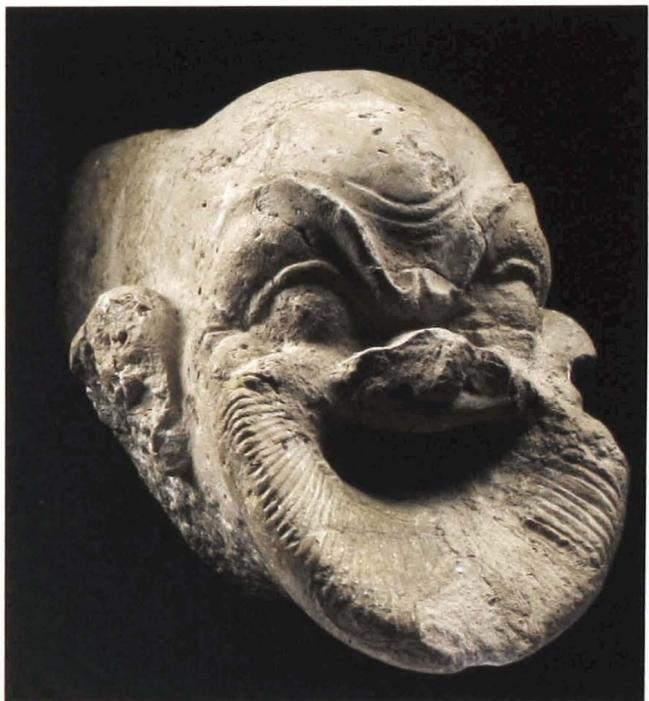
Length of channel at rear 17 cm; width and depth of outlet 10 cm and 7.5 cm.

The waterspout was found *in situ* in a fountain built against the outside of the western city wall, rising above the Oxus. It is probable that the fountain also served as a bath for visitors to the *gymnasium* immediately adjacent. The water for the fountain was drawn from irrigation channels on the plain, where it ran away into the soil and then resurfaced here.

The grotesque head is that of an old man, bald,

with a stiff and big fan-shaped beard surrounding his widely opened mouth, a short, flat nose, bulging eyes, heavy, swooping brows, and a narrow lumpy forehead. This is the representation of a theatrical mask, more exactly the stereotyped mask worn in the so-called New Comedy of the Hellenistic age by the slave cook, big-mouthed and constantly engaged in intrigues and taking side with the young lovers. One can easily imagine that the theatre of Ai Khanum (see p. 49) resounded to the jokes and japes of Sikon the Cook, a character in the recently rediscovered play *Dyskolos* ('The grouch') by Menander of Athens, the most famed comedy writer of his age.

This strikingly expressive mask betrays the hand of a first-class sculptor well versed in the knowledge of theatrical equipment. The water spout was installed at the time of the last repair to the fountain, in the first half of the second century BC, when the other outlets, some of which were found with their own gargoyle (lion and dolphin heads), became blocked by mineral accretions and it was necessary to pro-





vide an unobstructed new one. This find is all the more remarkable when it is realised that a mask is quite unusual as a decorative element in a fountain.

Bernard 1976, pp.307-313, fig. 18

Leriche - Thoraval 1979, pp. 171-205

Leriche 1986, pp. 32-33, 107-108, fig. 76-86 and 87-90, pl. 8-13

The necropolis

35 Funerary stele with a youth

Afghanistan, Ai Khanum,

Necropolis

Before 145 BC

Limestone

50 x 26 x 11.5 cm

National Museum of Afghanistan

MK 05.42.15

Height 57 cm; width 26 cm; average thickness of background 2.5 cm.

When it was discovered in 1971, this stele had been broken to pieces and the fragments reused in a clay masonry blocking the entrance to a mausoleum in the necropolis outside the ramparts. The twenty-nine fragments were pieced together by the French archaeologists. But it was later severely damaged once again, this time in the Kabul museum by Taliban religious fanatics, and subsequently restored by Afghan specialists; however, parts of it have been irretrievably lost (in particular the remnants of the head). The following description is based on a photo taken just after its discovery, before the damages inflicted by the Taliban. The stele represents in high relief (6.5 cm) a naked youth, leaning on his left leg. His only garment is a long cloak, attached around his neck by a brooch on his right shoulder, which falls down at his back, then continues in front on the left side, hanging loosely over the left lower arm. Behind the left shoulder a Greek *petasos*, the typical head-covering of the *ephebes*, is seen from underneath, hanging in the back, attached around the neck: it can be recognised from the curved edge in relief, partly damaged, of its broad and flat rim and from the inner circular contour of the cap hidden by the shoulder. The long hair falls in waves to the shoulders. The long cloak, quite similar to the Macedonian *chlamys*, along with the *petasos*, could be taken as characterising an *ephebe*, a youth performing his military service, were it not for the

fact that Greek youths were required to sacrifice their youthful locks upon joining the army. Could it be that the eastern style of long hair had gradually become more usual among the Graeco-Bactrian *ephebes* in training, or is this a Bactrian youth who has adopted Greek ways and attended the *gymnasium*, but wishes to display his eastern origins? A comparison with the exuberant wavy hairstyles of the Graeco-Scythian warriors shown on a pair of brooches from Tillya-tepe (cat. no. 79; see also cat. no. 136) is an argument for the second interpretation. Stylistically the rendering of this athletic nude, whose statuesque forms are softened by the delicate modelling of the musculature, belongs to the best tradition of late Greek classicism in the fourth century BC. The raised glance of the deep-set eyes gazing at the heavens, still preserved when the stele was discovered, added an emotional note in harmony with the sensitive treatment of the rich waving locks cascading to the shoulders: perhaps an echo of the lessons of the great fourth century innovator Scopas of Paros and of his romantic style had passed to the Graeco-Bactrian sculptor.

Bernard 1972, pp. 623-625, fig. 13



Tillya-tepe

Pierre Cambon

When a Soviet-Afghan team led by Viktor Sarianidi discovered the treasure of Tillya-tepe in 1978, it seemed that the archaeological exploration of Afghanistan, which began in 1922 in collaboration with the DAFA (Délégation Archéologique Française en Afghanistan) had reached its culminating point and at the same time its final stage. After 1945, the Afghan authorities made Afghanistan accessible to other foreign teams of archaeologists than the French (including teams from the United States, Italy and Japan). The Afghan authorities too created their own archaeological institute; it first began researches in Hadda, eastern Afghanistan in 1966. Tillya-tepe appeared to be the missing link in the Afghan archaeological enigma; this enigma seemed to be heading steadily towards a conclusion that would shed light on all the unfathomable issues pertaining to the region north of the Hindu Kush. The Soviet excavations north of the Oxus River (at present the Amu Darya) in Soviet territory in Uzbekistan (Khachayan and Dalverzin-tepe), and the discoveries made by the DAFA at Surkh Kotal and later at Ai Khanum had already brought some clarifications. The steppes gained a clearer position in history as a result of the Tillya-tepe excavations, from Alexander the Great's empire (fourth century BC) to the Kushan Empire (first century AD). Furthermore, the steppes also gained more importance through the archaeological story of this region, which began in 1913 in the northwest region of British India, now in Pakistan, with the excavation of Taxila organised by Sir John Marshall. Six graves were inadvertently laid bare in Tillya-tepe in a fortress that dates back to the Iron Age. They engendered completely new perspectives regarding the seemingly distant Eurasia. They shed new light on the beginning of the Christian era, on the period of the 'barbarian' invasions, a period for which written sources, either from China or from the West, are often lacking. In addition, they revealed unsuspected associations. This period was marked by numerous invasions from nomadic tribes who successively crossed the Oxus River and dispersed to the southern regions. Kings who cannot be easily identified through their coins succeeded each other. This resulted in a combination of Indo-Scythians, Indo-Parthians and Yuezhi: nomadic tribes originating in the northern regions and pressurised by the more easterly situated Xiongnu who, in their turn, were driven back by the

Chinese Empire of the Han Dynasty, when the Great Wall of China was built. Daniel Schlumberger deduced from the Surkh Kotal excavations that the Kushan rulers (their link to the Yuezhi nomads needs to be more closely examined) 'are non-Mediterranean descendants of the Greeks', much more affected by them than the Parthian dynasties'. On account of the Tillya-tepe excavations, the source of the problem seemed to change, given that the excavation results show a nomad world which is much more sophisticated, eclectic and more Greek than first expected – even more so than the realm of the Kushan emperor Kanishka. It now appears that his transcription of the Bactrian language in an alphabet derived from the Greek language, and found in a Surkh Kotal script, was in fact a break with the then operational Hellenistic tradition; what is more, it implies the return of values which are more Iranian by nature. Although there is a link between Tillya-tepe and China, and between Tillya-tepe and the Middle East, Tillya-tepe also shows surprisingly clear similarities with the Graeco-Scythian art which was discovered along the coastline of the Bosporus and in southern Russia, in Scythian Kurgans – this art form is clearly represented in the Siberian collection of Peter the Great, now kept in the State Hermitage Museum in St Petersburg. The impressive collection of nomadic gold from Tillya-tepe complements other treasures found on Afghan territory (although in many cases the treasures were pillaged or otherwise lost), such as the 'treasure of the Oxus', which finally ended up in the British Museum in London, or the treasure of Mir Zakah.

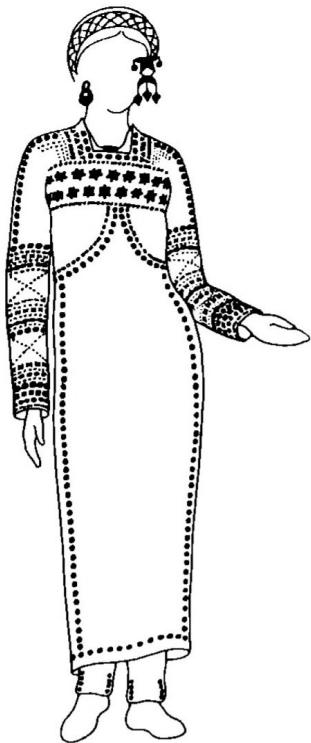
As a consequence of the chaotic political situation during the 1980s, and twenty years of terrible civil war in Afghanistan, a myth arose according to which 'the Bactrian gold' had vanished in a world of civil wars and fraternal disputes. The treasure, which was revealed for only a very short period and was published in 1985 in an outstanding Soviet publication, disappeared from view without explanation, although actually it had been securely concealed for safety's sake. To the general public however, the disappearance of the treasure was rather dubious: people thought that the treasure was lost forever because of the enmity between the various ruling powers and the more or less 'unconscious' information manipulation. Strife surged even more when a seventh grave was looted and the contents were said to be on sale at antique art markets; this resulted in a stream of new rumours and generated a rush of voracious bargain hunters.

What could this fabulous treasure, which contains in excess of 20,000 objects, conceal? In fact, it basically consists of burial objects from six graves which appeared to be fairly austere: each grave was a rectangular trench of two metres by two metres fifty, two meters below ground with, in the middle, supported by an under-frame, a rectangular wooden coffin without a lid, covered with a piece of cloth; they were however not devoid of a certain grandeur. Here lay the deceased, attired for their last journey: five women and one warrior; they must have been roughly thirty years of age when they died; their clothing had been stitched with gold thread; they wore bangles inlaid with semi-precious stones such as turquoise, garnet and lapis lazuli. Three of the women (grave I, II and VI) wore on their chests, hidden below their robes, a Chinese mirror virtually identical to those of the early Han Dynasty (around the first century BC). One of the women (grave II) wore a cap, probably Scythian, and pendants with a 'master of dragons' (cat. no. 61) depiction. Another woman (grave VI) was wearing a flower-shaped crown adorned with birds (cat. no. 134). Two of the women (grave I and VI, cat. no. 146) had a coin in their hand for the last journey; a Parthian coin from the first century BC. The crowned princess even had a silver coin in her mouth – according to Sarianidi this is a custom linked to Greek mythology, namely that the dead requires money to pay for crossing the river Styx in the netherworld. The warrior was a prince and was wearing costly and beautifully adorned weapons (daggers, scabbards, a gold plated belt with finely chased, circular relief embellishments). His head was resting on a gold plate with Greek inscriptions, to which a tiny golden tree and an ibex representation were affixed – probably the remainder of a head of state's headdress similar to the one found in the Novocherkassk treasure in southern Russia. The excavation also revealed horse remains atop the grave, and the gold coin with the man, the wheel and the roaring lion (cat. no. 119) was found in this same grave. Not only were there contacts with southern Russia, but the coin of Tiberius (cat. no. 95) proves that there were also contacts with the Roman Empire; this coin most likely arrived here from overseas via India. Other objects, such as garnets and a hair comb, reveal the link with India.

The Scythians lived between two worlds and, surprisingly enough, on both maritime and overland crossroads. The griffin on the chalcedonic seal, found in grave V (cat. no. 132) is a typical example of the ambiguity of this art that does not resemble any other art, because this mythological creature does not only evoke associations with Greek and Iranian art, but also with the Altai region where, according to Herodotus, the griffin was used to guard the goldmines. According to ancient writers the Scythians are expert at fleeing, extremely elusive and averse to any type of control. This elusiveness is also applicable to the 'dating' of Tillya-tepe, because the data which now seems to be emerging is contradictory. Most of the finds indicate the first century BC: Chinese mirrors, Parthian gold and silver coins; the jewels appear to be copied from older examples dating back to Graeco-Bactria when ruled by Eucratides I (170-145 BC, see the brooches with warriors designs from grave III, or the breast adornment with cameo from grave IV). The coin with the Tiberius depiction however indicates a different epoch (first century AD), this could be because it was found in grave III, which in all probability was muddled up by mice. Logically, it would mean that the Roman coin cannot be used as a scientific criterion to accurately date the Tillya-tepe graves.

¹ In his excerpt from Pompeius Trogus's *Historiae Philippicae*, Book XLI, chapter I, Junianus Justinus writes: 'The Parthians, now the masters of the East who share the world with the Romans, in fact, were Scythian exiles, because "Parth" means exile in Scythian [...]. Even when the Romans were at the peak of their power and led by their most renowned generals, thrice they fought the Parthians, however the Parthians were the only nation to withstand the Roman assaults; not only were they their equals, the Parthians also became the victors. Nevertheless, to the Parthians, it was less illustrious to force back a distant enemy than to gain a superior position amongst the then famous kingdoms such as Assyria, Media and Persia, close to the wealthy Bactria, the empire of a thousand cities, despite the persistent Scythians attacks, the continuous wars with the neighbouring countries, and all the other potential threats they were surrounded by.'

Grave I



Grave I lay on the west side of the mound, behind the walls surrounding the former temple. This was the first grave to be discovered, and it was found to be somewhat damaged before the actual excavations began. Nevertheless it was possible to establish the dimensions of the simple rectangular pit: it was 2.5 by 1.3 metres and 2 metres deep. It was not possible to determine the precise dimensions of the wooden coffin. As with the other graves, the coffin did not appear to have a lid, but on the basis of the organic traces found on the iron clamps which held the boards together we can suggest that it was wrapped in a cloth.

The body of the deceased, a young female aged between twenty and thirty and of average height (1.58 metres) lay on her back with her arms by her body and her head to the north. It is probable that she wore no diadem or crown, but her head was richly adorned with jewellery, attached either to a head covering or directly to her hair. Seven small appliqué images of the 'Man with a dolphin' (cat. no. 36), interpreted by the archaeologists as possibly decorating plaits of hair, were either fastened to the hair itself or to the upper outside of the clothing. A hair decoration (cat. no. 38) lay below the neck while a silver pin and a coloured cylindrical

ornament (cat. no. 54) were found close to the left temple. A single earring, a navicella (boat-shaped) (cat. no. 42), lay in the area of the right ear. Further ornaments, two rosettes with pendants (cat. no. 41), were found to the right of the body. Finally, the deceased wore a simple chain around her neck, with a closure formed by two small tubes (cat. no. 43).

Based on the remnants of gold thread and pearls found below the body it is possible that the woman wore a shawl or a cape around her shoulders, or perhaps two robes. The arrangement of the threads and pearls suggests a piece of fabric embroidered with large motifs, possibly showing vegetals, comparable with those on the pelisses found in frozen graves in the Altai Mountains (Rudenko 1953, pl. XCII, 2) as well as Afghan coats of reversed sheepskin. This garment or over-garment was held together with a pair of round clasps of solid gold (cat. no. 37). The large quantity of sewn-on bracteates and other ornaments demonstrate the refined and luxurious nature of the ornamentation, in particular those on the tunic, which was probably worn over trousers, whose similarly adorned legs were probably worn over (or inside?) footwear, possibly flexible boots.

Numerous bracteates (cat. nos. 44-52), appliqués and a brooch (cat. no. 39) were found, particularly on the breast-piece and sleeves. By carefully studying the location of each layer it has been possible to determine to some extent how they were arranged. It was observed for example that the large six-leaved rosettes (cat. no. 40), grouped in two rows, decorated the tunic at breast level. The two bands running to the shoulders featured complex decorations making use of bracteates, including triangles of gold with a granulated finish (cat. no. 44), double lozenges in turquoise, lapis lazuli and pyrites (cat. no. 46) and three-leaved motifs with turquoise inlay work (cat. no. 52). It is not clear where the three pendants (cat. no. 53) with pins to the rear were attached.

Square bracteates with turquoise inlay work were sewn onto the sleeves (cat. no. 49), as were double gold spirals in the form of volutes (cat. no. 50), bracteates with turquoise inlay showing a heart with four droplets (cat. no. 51) and – at shoulder level – 'masks' (cat. no. 48).

A badly damaged coin (an *obol* of Sanab-Heraeus), probably held by the deceased in her hand, was found in the area of the pelvis. The date of the coin is unclear, but it may come from the first quarter of the first century AD.

The woman also had a round ivory powder compact. It lay by her right arm and contained remnants of powdery material. Traces of a woven basket could be seen by her left knee, with a residue of white and bright pink cosmetics (for the cheeks?), a crystallised black substance (antimony sulphide for the eyes?), and various toiletry items (silver and ivory boxes, an iron spatula, tweezers, a bone rod).



36 Seven appliqué plates, showing the 'Man with a dolphin'

Afghanistan, Tillya-tepe, grave I
 Second quarter of the 1st century AD
 Gold
 4.1 x 2.9 cm
 National Museum of Afghanistan
 MK 04.40.303

Each of the seven plates shows a male figure seen from the front, the head inclined slightly to the right, the upper body naked above a sort of skirt made of three large, veined acanthus leaves. Below the skirt we see an undulating double tail rather than legs, with volutes on either side, ending at the waist with a cloverleaf.

This monster – half man and half snake – bears a great fish on its shoulders, draped around the neck, with the left hand next to its head and the right hand holding the tail. The right hand also holds a tool, possibly a shovel-looking oar or short paddle.

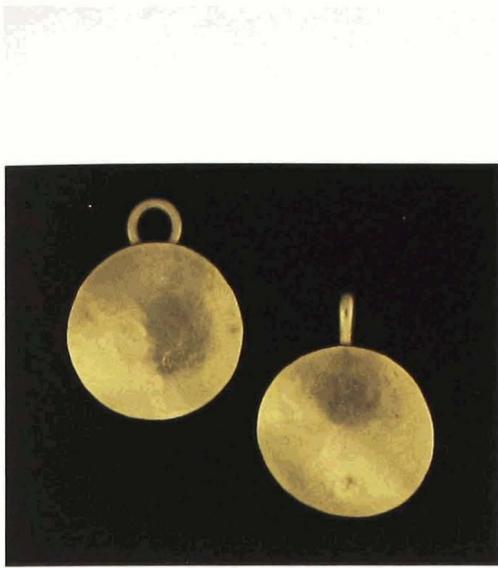
The monster's hair is indicated by dots. The broad face with its almond-shaped eyes looks flattened. The nose is wide, with pronounced nostrils. Only the left ear is shown, the earlobe

marked with a recess. A double arched and hatched motif is applied in the area of the elbows and above the shoulders, broadening out as it descends. It was thought to be a plant motif but is more probably two wings. At the base of the appliqué three rounded recesses alternate with double crescents. The simple gold leaf reliefs here show a goldsmith's arrangement found on various other jewels at Tillya-tepe (cat. nos. 72, 73 and 129).

The plates are stamped, but may not have used a single matrix. Leaving aside the engraved details (for example the facial expression, the navel and the breast) the attitude, particularly that of the head and the shape of the cheekbones vary between the different examples. A comparable figure can be seen on an ivory object from Begram (cat. no. 151), another example of which is in the collection of the Musée Guimet (MG no. 19011). However, some visual misunderstanding exists as to the interpretation of their shared model.

There seems little doubt that the figure is a water god. The oar is one of the traditional attributes of the Tritons. The fish has the head of a dolphin but a scaly body, and is compara-

ble with the fish shown on the clasps (cat. nos. 59 and 80) where they are ridden by cupids. This motif is inspired by a depiction of a dolphin, a very common subject in Greek art. However the great head and the flattened snout, combined with the carp-like scales, are reminiscent of the huge fish living in the nearby Oxus (Amu Darya): a catfish or a variety of sturgeon. Could the bearer of the fish be the god of the Oxus? The most persuasive comparison brought forward as an explanation of this image is a creature whose image was quite common among the Scythian nomads living to the west of the steppes from the last third of the fourth century BC. Its visual vocabulary derives from the 'half-vegetal goddess' found in the Greek or Hellenised art of the time (including mosaics in Olynthus and Vergina in northern Greece, a column capital from the palace of Euagoras at Salamis on Cyprus and a Thracian grave at Sveshtari in Bulgaria). Just as in the objects exhibited, the three-pointed 'skirt' combined with plants and 'snake-foot' forms (see Tolstaya Mogila and Tsimbalka in Artamonov 1968, pl. 186). The figure often has wings (*op. cit.* pl. 189, 230, 308), but it is always feminine. She is identified as the 'snake woman' who Herodotus tells us (IV, 9) was believed by the nomads to be the daughter of the river Borys-thenes (the Dnieper) and the mother of all Scythians. This explanation by the Greek historian tells us a great deal about the substantial role played by this creature, who belongs both to earth and to water, in the world of the steppes, and shows how important was the notion of a power renewing the forces of Nature, uniting in itself both the male and the female. The Bactrian culture of the Bronze Age also had its 'snake man' (Azarpay 1991). As well as the 'Mistress of the Animals' from grave VI (cat. no. 137) a 'Dragon Master' was also found in grave II (cat. no. 61). In this world of steppe and desert, where water was of crucial importance, the 'man with a dolphin' was naturally closely associated with power over water, with its ability to create fertility.



37 A pair of smooth, round clasps

Afghanistan, Tillya-tepe grave I
Second quarter of the 1st century AD
Gold
 \varnothing 3.3 cm
National Museum of Afghanistan
MK 04.40.301

38 Hair ornament

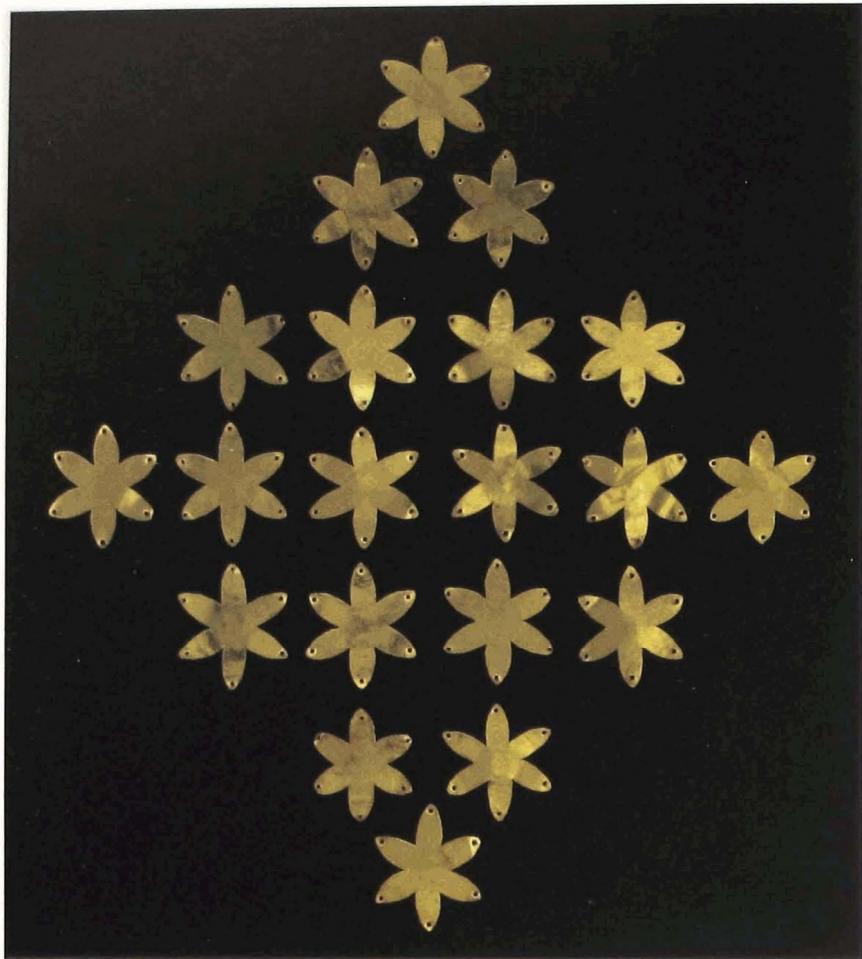
Afghanistan, Tillya-tepe grave I
Second quarter of the 1st century AD
Gold
H 6.5 cm
National Museum of Afghanistan
MK 04.40.305

This hair adornment was made from gold leaf, with five excised leaves. Small discs are attached to the two outermost leaves. The two innermost leaves retain a crescent, with three pendant veined leaves. A 1 cm tube is fitted to the rear, allowing the ornament to be attached vertically to a rod. Two hairpins found in grave VI are broadly similar in appearance (cat. no. 142).

39 Five-leaved brooch in the form of a flower wreath

Afghanistan, Tillya-tepe grave I
Second quarter of the 1st century AD
Gold, turquoise, mother of pearl
 \varnothing 5.0 cm
National Museum of Afghanistan
MK 04.40.299





40 Six-leaved rosettes

Afghanistan, Tillya-tepe grave I
Second quarter of the 1st century AD
Gold
Ø 3.5 cm
National Museum of Afghanistan
MK 04.40.298

41 Two ornaments in the form of flowers, with a 'small tree' and pendants

Afghanistan, Tillya-tepe grave I
Second quarter of the 1st century AD
Gold
Ø 4.0 cm
National Museum of Afghanistan
MK 04.40.297

42 Earring

Afghanistan, Tillya-tepe grave I
Second quarter of the 1st century AD
Gold
2.9 x 2.4 cm
National Museum of Afghanistan
MK 04.40.300

This type of earring, a navicella (boat-shaped) with a hook, in this case hollow and granulated, is a not uncommon form of Greek jewellery and is also found to the north of the Black Sea. This example however is sole and an open ring has been added to the hook. This may indicate that it is an unmatched earring, re-used as a hair ornament.

43 Chain and fastening

Afghanistan, Tillya-tepe, grave I
Second quarter of the 1st century AD
Gold
L 45.0 cm
National Museum of Afghanistan
MK 04.40.304

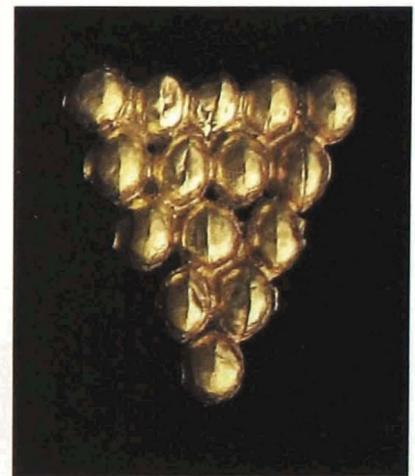
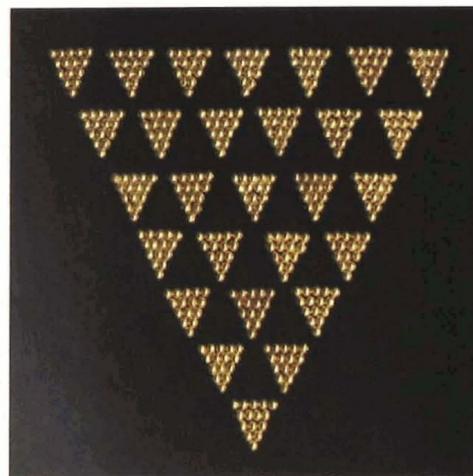
This simple chain is made from interlinking bent rings, clasped together in the middle. The fastening consists of a pair of tubes, hinged at the ends, which can be fixed together by means of a vertical rod with a nail head.





44 > **Triangular granulated bracteates**

Afghanistan, Tillya-tepe, grave I
Second quarter of the 1st century AD
Gold
1.3 x 1.0 cm
National Museum of Afghanistan
MK 04.40.323







45 Bracteates made from opposed triangles with imitation granulation

Afghanistan, Tillya-tepe, grave I
 Second quarter of the 1st century AD
 Gold
 1.1×0.7 cm
 National Museum of Afghanistan
 MK 04.40.309

46 Bracteates made from opposed triangles, inlaid and with a granulated finish

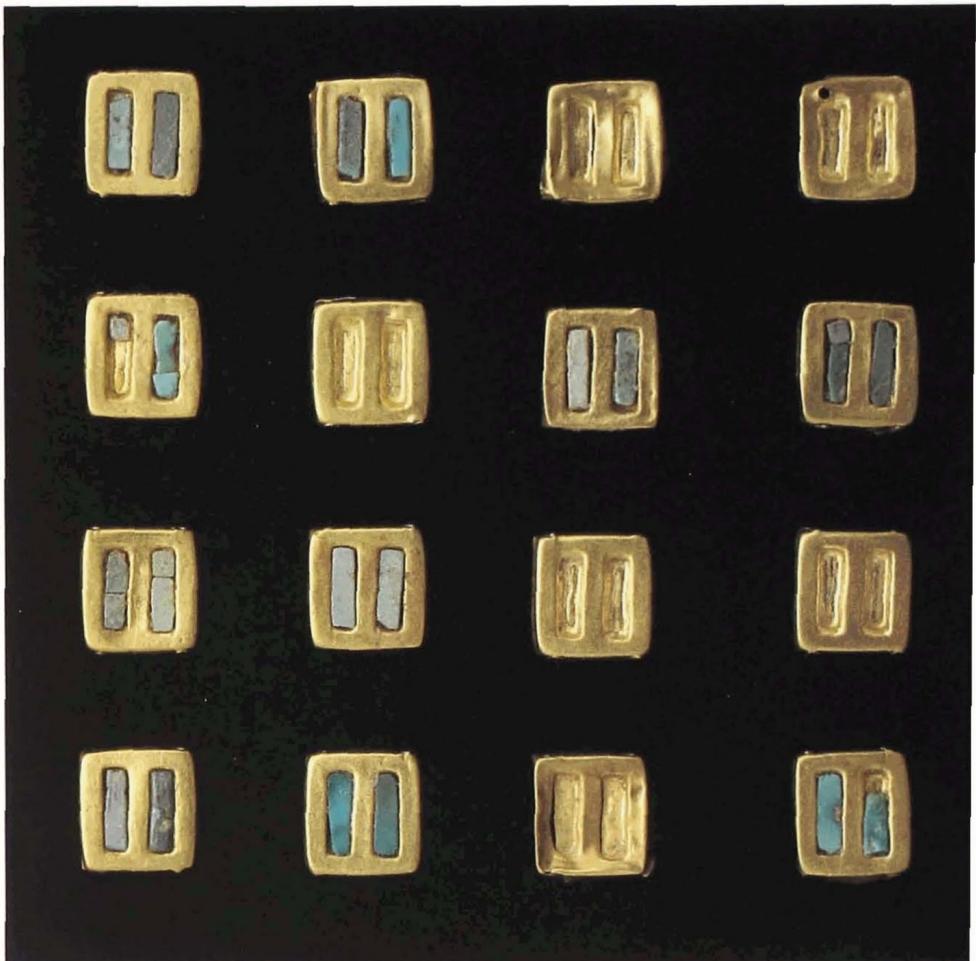
Afghanistan, Tillya-tepe, grave I
 Second quarter of the 1st century AD
 Gold, turquoise, lapis lazuli, pyrites
 0.4×0.35 cm
 National Museum of Afghanistan
 MK 04.40.331

47 Round, five-leaved bracteates around a core

Afghanistan, Tillya-tepe, grave I
 Second quarter of the 1st century AD
 Gold, turquoise, garnet
 $\varnothing 1.0$ cm
 National Museum of Afghanistan
 MK 04.40.327

.8 ^ Bracteates in the shape of a 'mask'

Afghanistan, Tillya-tepe, grave I
 Second quarter of the 1st century AD
 Gold, turquoise, garnet, ivory (eyes)
 $\varnothing 1.0$ cm
 National Museum of Afghanistan
 MK 04.40.322



49 ^ Square bracteates with inlay work in turquoise

Afghanistan, Tillya-tepe, grave I
 Second quarter of the 1st century AD
 Gold, turquoise
 0.9×0.8 cm
 National Museum of Afghanistan
 MK 04.40.330



50 ^ **Volutiform bracteates
(opposed ram's heads)**

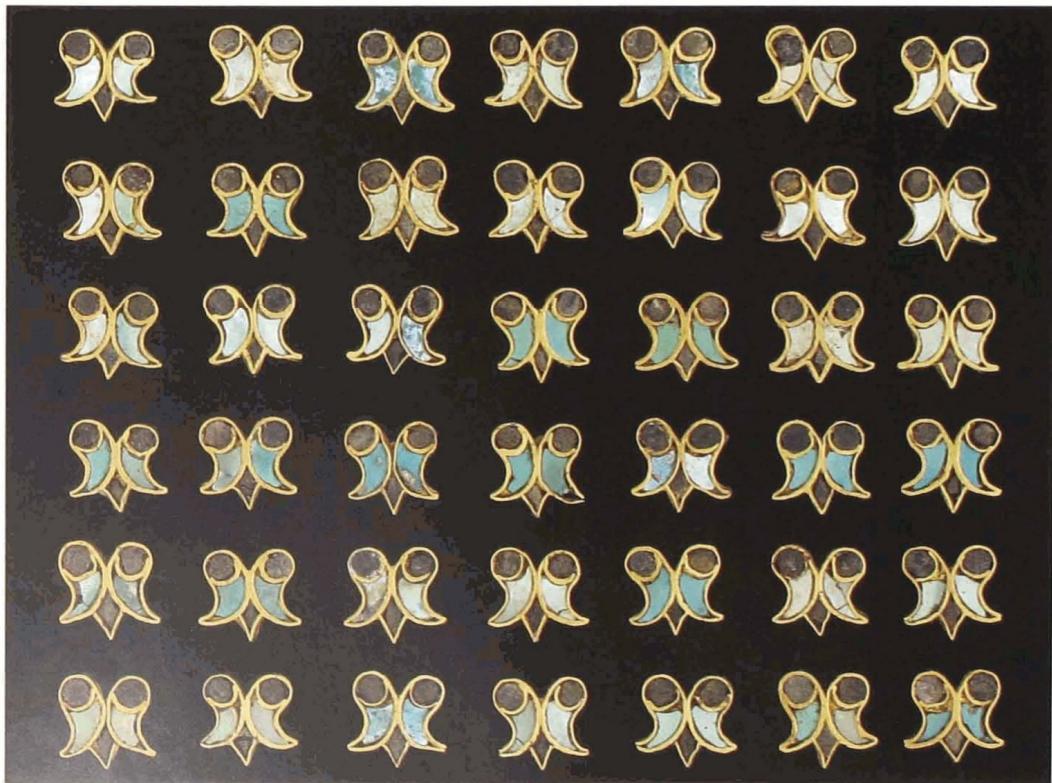
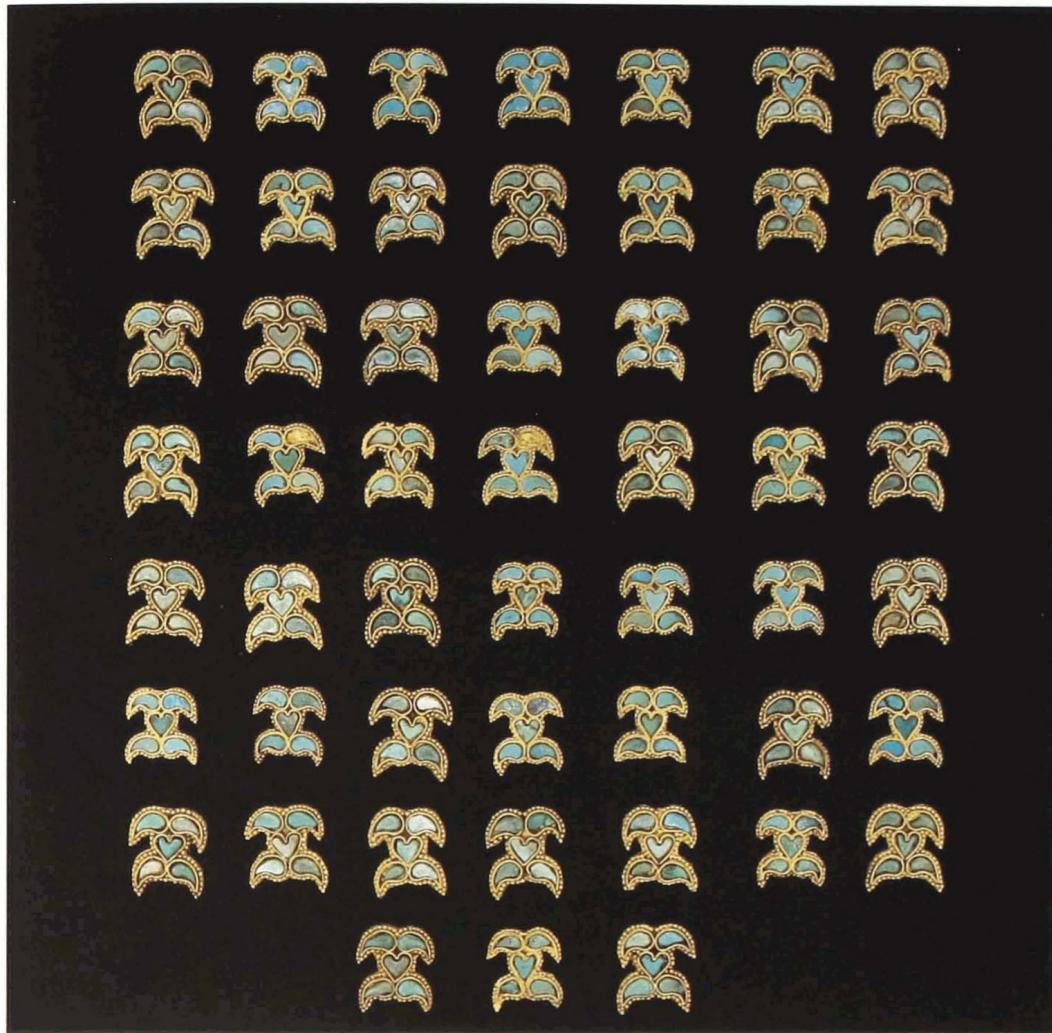
Afghanistan, Tillya-tepe, grave I
Second quarter of the 1st century AD
Gold
1.1 x 1.0 cm
National Museum of Afghanistan
MK 04.40.321

51 > **Bracteates shaped like a heart
and four droplets with an edge
lined with granulation**

Afghanistan, Tillya-tepe, grave I
Second quarter of the 1st century AD
Gold, turquoise, lapis lazuli
1.3 x 1.1 cm
National Museum of Afghanistan
MK 04.40.312

52 > **Three-leaved bracteates (lotus?)
with inlay work**

Afghanistan, Tillya-tepe, grave I
Second quarter of the 1st century AD
Gold, turquoise, pyrites
0.9 x 0.9 cm
National Museum of Afghanistan
MK 04.40.313





53 Rosettes of fourteen leaves with a round pendant

Afghanistan, Tillya-tepe, grave I
Second quarter of the 1st century AD
Gold
Ø 1.5 and 1.2 cm
National Museum of Afghanistan
MK 04.40.307

54 Cylindrical ornament in the form of a drum

Afghanistan, Tillya-tepe, grave I
Second quarter of the 1st century AD
Gold, turquoise, garnet, mother of pearl
1.4 x 1.1 cm
National Museum of Afghanistan
MK 04.40.326

The golden cylinder is set off above and below with a finely granulated border and edge, with a double row of bezels or stone settings placed with their convex faces together. The inlay work is arranged so that an attractive pattern of colour emerges. The matt turquoises contrast beautifully with the white gloss of the mother of pearl lozenges, and alternate with sparkling, transparent red garnets, probably of Indian origin. The flat sides of the drum have first a series of five carefully placed holes to allow a thread to be inserted, and second four larger slots, made more crudely with a tool stuck through the object from top to bottom, damaging the gold

leaf: it may be that the object originally had some other function.

A comparable golden cylinder with a granulated rim but also with pendants was discovered in grave 2 at Pazyryk in Siberia's Altai Mountains (Rudenko 1953, fig. 58 and pl. XXVII, 10); this is thought to be an earring. Cylindrical or spool-shaped earrings have also been found in Sarmatian graves along the river Don (Schiltz 2001, nos. 171, 280). A cylindrical earring was also discovered at Dalverzin-tepe in Uzbekistan

(Pougatchenkova 1978, fig. 77). The silver pin also found beside the woman's left temple gave the excavator the idea that the cylinder might be attached to the hair with the pin. It is also possible that this ring was directly braided into the hair, or at least reused as such a hair ornament.

This would account for the large holes, as knotted or braided hair could be passed through these, a practice encountered elsewhere among nomads.



Grave II



This grave was placed behind the northern wall of the temple. It was oriented northeast-southwest: in other words the corners pointed to the four points of the compass. The grave formed a rectangle of 3.0 x 1.6 metres. The base was 2 metres below the mound's ground level.

The coffin was 2.2 metres long and 0.65 metres wide and rested on wooden supports. There was no lid, but there were traces of plaster on the outside of the coffin. The presence of round gold and silver plates indicated that a cloth had been wound around it. The coffin was slightly out of line with the axis of the grave, and the head of the occupant was to the north. Was this due to chance, or to the ground conditions? It is noteworthy that the orientation of the corners of the excavated grave to the four points of the compass, and the position of the body not completely in line with the axis of the grave (although the head was generally to the south), match what is found in the graves of the Alani at the time when this group appeared halfway through the first century AD in the steppes

near the Don river, and introduced a style of polychrome objects in gold and turquoise.

The deceased person, a woman in her twenties, lay on her back. Judging by the location of the appliqués found, she probably wore a high conical head covering of felt or leather. High conical head coverings were generally worn among the nomads, from the Ukrainian steppes to the Altai Mountains. Some of the Saka tribes even bore names meaning 'high caps' (the Tigraxauda, mentioned in an inscription by Cyrus in Behistun, Iran, and the Orthocorybantes mentioned by Herodotus). In this case we are dealing with a head covering lacking ear flaps, so that it is comparable to those worn by the Parthians and Kushans, and even more similar to the earliest known women's headwear, found, to the west of the steppes but also to the east, in Tuva, where brooches were found there with lengths of 30 to 35 cm alongside a woman in a grave at Arzhan.

Framing the face lay two ornaments with pendants (cat. no. 76), probably attached to the hair, and a pair of double-sided pendants showing the 'Dragon Master' (cat. no. 61). These were once attached to the head covering. The woman's jaw was secured with a golden chinstrap.

As well as a necklace of gold and black beads (cat. no. 78) and three rings (cat. nos. 55, 56 and 57) she wore on each wrist a bracelet with antelope heads (cat. no. 58) and rings around her ankles (cat. no. 77).

Various pieces of jewellery were attached to her clothing. Clasps with cupids riding dolphins (cat. no. 59) held together the two sides of a long gown at breast level. This garment had a large number of droplet bracteates in gold attached (cat. no. 74). The 'Kushana Aphrodite' (cat. no. 60) was placed as an ornament centrally on the breast. Figures of musicians (cat. no. 75) were found near the shoulders, and probably form the two ends of a neckline ornament. The bust was covered with heart-shaped bracteates (cat. no. 63) and appliqués in the form of vertical strips (cat. no. 72) echoing strips on the shoulders (cat. no. 73). The hem of the sleeves was decorated with rows of bracteates, including a ram's head (cat. no. 62) and a stepped pyramid (cat. no. 67). Above these were worn various types of amulet, in the form of an axe, a fish, a pomegranate, a hand (cat. nos. 69 and 70) and a foot (cat. nos. 68 and 71). The hem of the trousers was also decorated with a row of appliqués.

A gold cylinder, possibly a sceptre, lay close to the right hand. A Chinese mirror lay on the breast, probably between the tunic and the outer gown. A woven basket decorated with round appliqué work ornaments (cat. nos. 64, 65 and 66) had been placed on the legs. It contained an iron axe and two knives of a type also found in Siberia. At the feet lay a silver box.

This grave was apparently the only one which did not contain coins.



55 Ring with an image of Athena

Afghanistan, Tillya-tepe, grave II
 Second quarter of the 1st century AD
 Gold
 3.0 x 2.7 cm
 National Museum of Afghanistan
 MK 04.40.116

The ring has a gold setting surrounding a white gold panel depicting the goddess, sitting but lacking a seat, with her face to the left but the upper body facing forwards. She holds her right arm outstretched, the hand palm down. The left arm seems to rest on the hip and at the same time to hold a lance and shield. She carries a Graeco-Bactrian helmet with a plume hanging down to the rear. Her features are pronounced: a long, sharp nose extends from the forehead; she has an open mouth with well-marked lips and a prominent chin. She appears to wear a necklace. The hem of her tunic is indicated by a double row of dots at the knee.

The name of the goddess Athena is engraved in reverse at the left, indicating that the ring was intended as a seal. Athena was a very popular subject among the nomads, probably because of her warlike nature (see cat. nos. 56, 105 and 127); the same was true of the Kushan dynasty.

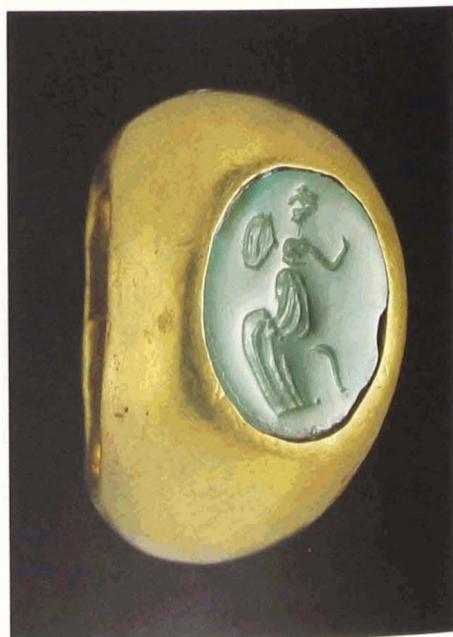


Ring with an intaglio depicting

Afghanistan, Tillya-tepe, grave II
 Second quarter of the 1st century AD
 Gold, turquoise
 3.0 x 2.7 cm
 National Museum of Afghanistan
 MK 04.40.117

The attitude of Athena is comparable with that shown in the previous ring, except that a seat is suggested by means of a curved line, the goddess appearing to float above it. The head is barely delineated. A similar line of stippling is shown at the knees, indicating the hem of a tunic, however the folds of the robe reach down to the ground.

The goddess radiates calm, but holds a shield before her as though she was walking forward, and the left arm reaches back as though leaning on a lance, but this is not visible. These omissions provide a good demonstration of how iconography can lose certain details over the course of time, thereby losing its meaning.



57 **Ring, with an amethyst in a setting of twelve precious stones**

Afghanistan, Tillya-tepe, grave II
Second quarter of the 1st century AD
Gold, amethyst, turquoise, lapis lazuli, amber
3.3 x 3.0 cm
National Museum of Afghanistan
MK 04.40.115

58 **Pair of bracelets (antelopes?)**

Afghanistan, Tillya-tepe, grave II
Second quarter of the 1st century AD
Gold, turquoise, carnelian
8.5 x 6.3 cm
National Museum of Afghanistan
MK 04.40.114

This is an example of the practicality of the visual vocabulary of the steppes. The animal, probably an antelope, has a bent spine which determines the shape of the bracelet. His nose rests on his outstretched feet. The horns and ears are inlaid with turquoise and point backwards as though flattened by the wind while the animal runs. Turquoise droplets inserted in the gold indicate the shoulders, hips and hooves.

Typical of the art of the nomads, similar bracelets were also found with the Oxus treasure (now partly held by the British Museum), in the burial site at Dachi by the Sea of Azov in southern Russia (Schiltz 2001 no. 236), and examples also feature in the Siberian collection of Peter the Great (now in the Hermitage in St Petersburg). The bracelets show clear signs of wear, indicating that they were in actual use.





59 A pair of clasps. Cupid figures mounted on dolphins

Afghanistan, Tillya-tepe, grave II
Second quarter of the 1st century AD
Gold
4.5 x 3.0 cm
National Museum of Afghanistan
MK 04.40.175

This pair of symmetrical clasps is joined by means of a hook and ring attached to the noses of the dolphins. To the rear are four attachment points. On the front are winged cupids, mounted on large fish with rounded heads. Their bodies feature deep recesses which were intended to contain inlay (see also cat. no. 80). When carefully examined these creatures bear little resemblance to dolphins. They are unlike the animals depicted as mounts in the countless images of Taras, Arion or Eros on the island of Delos. Neither do they resemble the dolphin shown on a stone in the fountain at Ai Khanum, where the water jet in the form of a theatrical mask was found (cat. no. 34), or the dolphin with a cupid which sits at the feet of Caesar Augustus in the famous statue from Prima Porta in

the Vatican Museum, the bronze original of which dates from shortly after 20 BC, the year in which the Roman insignia were returned by the Parthians, while the Indians and Scythians sent envoys to the leader of the Roman Empire. These 'dolphins' are squat and scaly, and it appears that the cupid figures are holding on by one hand to the animal's dorsal fin, which has been moved forward until it resembles a quiff of hair on the head. Various other images show how this displacement was caused, like the depiction on the tap of the Trajanus's fountain in Ephesus (modern Turkey) or the tableau in polychrome stucco on a sarcophagus from Kerch in the Crimea, now on display in the Louvre. One detail is particularly notable however: three grooves radiate out from the corner of the eyes, which are out of place there unless they symbolise the barbels of a catfish, which does indeed have three on each side. The long tail fin is also characteristic of the catfish. This was a giant fish, which seemed to lord it over the other river creatures, and must have made an impression on the local inhabitants, be it nomads or sedentary people. The cupid figures are naked and plump, they

are winged and wear crowns with recesses for inlays. They are shown in half profile: one wing is cut short in the Greek manner. They wear crossed bands on their chests, more as decoration than as straps for their wings. They have bracelets at the wrist and ankle, and one hand carries a round object, hollowed out into a cup in order to hold a coloured stone.

60 Appliqué, 'Kushana Aphrodite'

Afghanistan, Tillya-tepe, grave II
Second quarter of the 1st century AD
Gold
4.5 x 2.5 cm
National Museum of Afghanistan
MK 04.40.113

This female figure, her attractive name provided by the archaeologists who found her, is flanked on the right by a plump and naked cupid, a character readily associated with Aphrodite. The image of Aphrodite with a small figure of Eros on her left shoulder is indeed almost a cliché, particularly in goldsmith's work. Here however the butterfly



wings are clearly those of Psyche. This subtle Greek distinction may have escaped the notice of the young woman who wore the ornament. Psyche-Aphrodite is accompanied by Eros, in this case a very youthful Eros. He seems to have wings; his face is barely indicated although his gender is very clear. She is rather short and squat in build and wears a kind of turban, or

it may be a knot of hair, with locks falling over the left ear. Her face is broad and turned to the right, with a low forehead and long brows drawn as an extension of the nose, springing out above notably large eyes. The neck is very short. The upper body is naked to the hips, apart from two strips of material hanging over the shoulders and meeting between the small

breasts and then disappearing behind the back at the level of her rounded stomach. Perhaps this represents the attachment of the wings, although it was more usual in Roman art to use purely decorative breast-bands, and even more so in the art of Gandhara and India. Another odd detail is provided by the two symmetrical pillars, obviously inspired by the pedestals



of a throne, although the goddess is shown standing.

Two small gold appliqués of the same type and from around the same time were found among the Indo-Parthian level from Taxila in Pakistan (Marshall 1951, pl. 191, nos. 96 and 97). Like our Aphrodite, these had a flat plate with attachment points on the rear, with the attachment created by two pairs of soldered rings.

61 A pair of pendants showing the 'Dragon Master'

Afghanistan, Tillya-tepe, grave II
Second quarter of the 1st century AD
Gold, turquoise, garnet, lapis lazuli, carnelian, pearls
12.5 x 6.5 cm
National Museum of Afghanistan
MK 04.40.109

Both pendants have a suspension ring at the top of the middle section. The various chains and pendants, ingeniously attached and pro-

viding a tinkling sound, transform these into remarkable pieces of jewellery adding a sonorous effect to the impressive visual aspect of the object. The pendants consist of two identical plates soldered together, and they can therefore be read on either side of the face. This confirms all the more their mobile character, that they can turn around.

There is a central image of a man, shown frontally, who holds two mythical creatures firmly by their front legs, his arms spread wide. His indented crown resembles that worn over



his leather and felt hat by the individual from grave 3 in Pazyryk in Siberia (Rudenko 1953, pl. XCVI, 2), but it is also similar to the crowns of Achaemenid and later Sasanian rulers of Iran. The man has broad, flat cheekbones and two conspicuously slanting large eyes. He has a dot Indian style on his forehead. He wears a neck ring or torque around his neck. The man is dressed as a nomad, in a kaftan with crossed panels fastened at the waist; the swelling folds, particularly at the sleeves, suggest that his robe is of a thick material (reversed sheepskin?).

Under the spreading kaftan he wears a garment first interpreted as a kind of compromise between the Persian tunic and riding breeches, but which is now (Pfrommer 1996, Boardman 2003) seen as a 'skirt' in the form of a three-lobed acanthus leaf, similar to that worn by the 'Man with a dolphin' (cat. no. 36). The two dragons have crests of turquoise droplets. Their supple, cat-like backs form a double S. Their rear legs are reversed and seem to point upward, a typical motif from the art of the steppes which is frequently encountered

in the Altai Mountains and in Tuva in Siberia, but also in Alagou in the Chinese province of Xinjiang (Francfort 1998, fig. 6, 7 and 8), in Issyk (Kazakhstan) and also among the objects in the Siberian collection of Peter the Great in the Hermitage in St Petersburg (Rudenko 1962, pl. VIII, 7 and 8). The turquoise at the ends of their claws resemble clogs rather than claws. The archaeologist who unearthed the object called it 'the master fighting the dragons': he saw the two creatures as horses with wings and horns, and the monsters do indeed have mouths



that stretch from ear to ear without teeth. But in view of their flexible backs, thin tails and in particular the short wings and the grooved ibex horns, granulated where they join the skull, these are hybrid beings which cannot be categorised, though they resemble winged and horned lions more than dragons. We are dealing here with a very traditional eastern iconographic motif, both in the male and female varieties: the Master or Mistress of Animals, with a plant motif added here by means of the 'skirt', which also recurs with

the (aquatic? lotus?) flowers on the round pendants.

But above all, thanks to its strong sense of expansion through space, a mighty movement which exceeds all boundaries, and the carved-out forms that all express fluid curved lines, the iconography of these pendants, which cannot be placed into a neat framework, reflects the essence of the nomadic spirit: an attempt to seize hold of space and experience an attachment to it.

62 ▲ Bracteates in the form of a ram's head

Afghanistan, Tillya-tepe, grave II
Second quarter of the 1st century AD
Gold, turquoise, carnelian
1.5 x 1.0 cm
National Museum of Afghanistan
MK 04.40.81

63 > **Heart-shaped bracteates**

Afghanistan, Tillya-tepe, grave II
Second quarter of the 1st century AD
Gold, turquoise
1.1 x 1.0 cm
National Museum of Afghanistan
MK 04.40.89

64 ✓ **Bracteates in the form of a toothed disc**

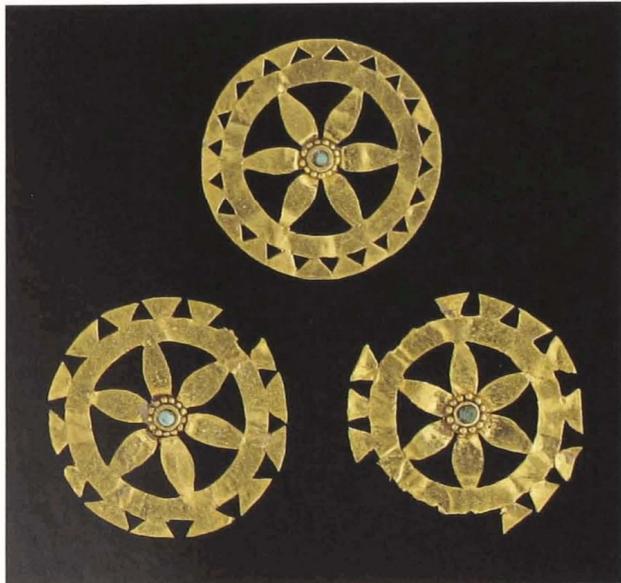
Afghanistan, Tillya-tepe, grave II
Second quarter of the 1st century AD
Gold
Ø 2.0 cm
National Museum of Afghanistan
MK 04.40.88

65 ✓ **Three bracteates in the form of toothed discs**

Afghanistan, Tillya-tepe, grave II
Second quarter of the 1st century AD
Gold
Ø 2.0 and 1.4 cm
National Museum of Afghanistan
MK 04.40.87

66 ▲ **Two round bracteates with heart-shaped decoration**

Afghanistan, Tillya-tepe, grave II
Second quarter of the 1st century AD
Gold
Ø 1.6 cm
National Museum of Afghanistan
MK 04.40.86





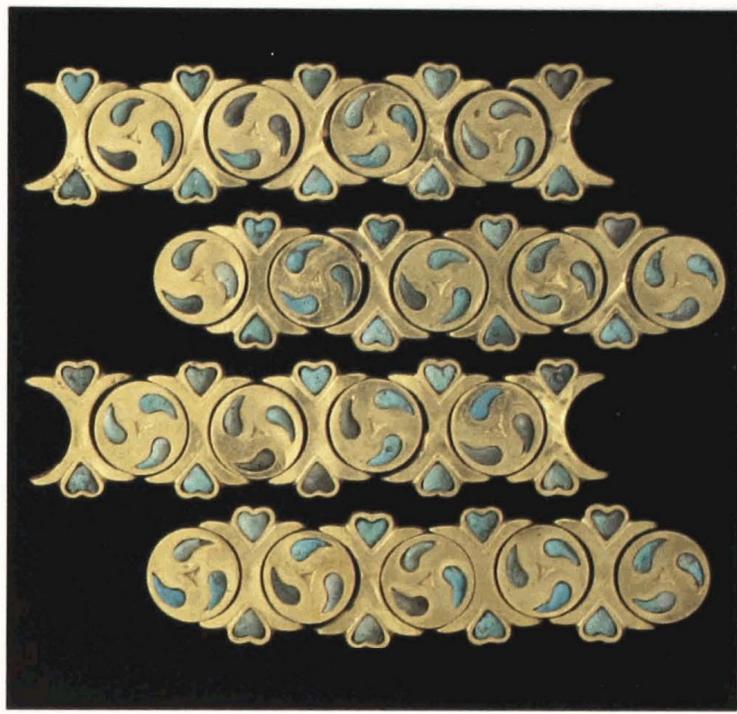
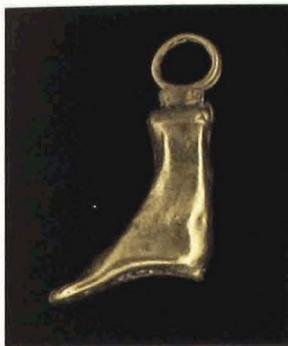
67 Bracteates in the form of stepped pyramids

Afghanistan, Tillya-tepe, grave II
Second quarter of the 1st century AD
Gold
1.2 x 1.0 cm
National Museum of Afghanistan
MK 04.40.78

The stepped pyramid is an architectural form with a very long history in the East and was already known during the kingdom of Urartu (ninth to sixth century BC, in modern Turkey

and Armenia) and in particular in the Iran of the Achaemenids (sixth to fourth century BC), first as a defensive construction and later as a decorative element, for example in Persepolis in the battlements surmounting the walls. When applied to bracteates this form offered not only the opportunity for spatial or linear arrangement, but also a head-tail structure, where the interlinking plates could form a band, belt or breast-ribbon, as seen in objects from Taxila-Sirkap in Pakistan (Marshall 1953, pl. 194, 75), or the tightly bound gold shield, strong yet flexible.

Bracteates of this toothed form are also found in Sarmatian graves alongside the Don, in particular at Dachi, close to the river mouth (Schiltz 2001, no. 230). They were used here to decorate a *shabruk* or horse blanket, in which objects with gold and turquoise decorations were wrapped. Toothed bracteates are also found as a decorative motif on a Sarmatian gilded silver jar from Vysochino, in the steppes of the lower Don (Schiltz 2001, no. 208).



Amulets

Pendants made of gold and with gemstones set in gold were found in grave II and also in graves III (cat. no. 103), V and VI. They come in all kinds of shapes: hands, feet, human or animal teeth, a pomegranate and a fish have been found, as well as an axe, a bell and a miniature jar. There are also intaglios. These objects were worn as amulets. They were not merely decorative, but formed part of an ancient tradition among the nomads. They were found as far back as the Scythians (see also Schiltz 2001, nos. 95-98) and at the time of the Sarmatians (Schiltz 2001, nos. 273 and 274). Their effectiveness was felt to be due not only to their shape and the images they carried, but also to the kind of precious stones used and the protective effects ascribed to these. Judging by the number of empty containers found, some were probably made of organic materials like wood, leather or fur. It is remarkable that earthenware amulets on the Egyptian model, widely distributed around the Mediterranean world and certainly in use among the Sarmatians in the west, did not seem to be known to the people of Tillya-tepe, who also seem to have been unaware of the Egyptian deity Bes, evidence of which was however found in the Altai Mountains in Siberia.

68 ↗ Amulet in the form of a foot

Afghanistan, Tillya-tepe, grave II
Second quarter of the 1st century AD
Gold
1.5 x 0.9 cm
National Museum of Afghanistan
MK 04.40.77

69 ↗ Amulet in the form of a hand

Afghanistan, Tillya-tepe, grave II
Second quarter of the 1st century AD
Gold, turquoise
1.1 x 0.5 cm
National Museum of Afghanistan
MK 04.40.99

70 ↗ Amulet in the form of a hand

Afghanistan, Tillya-tepe, grave II
Second quarter of the 1st century AD
Gold, turquoise
1.5 x 0.6 cm
National Museum of Afghanistan
MK 04.40.102

71 ↗ Two amulets in the form of feet

Afghanistan, Tillya-tepe, grave II
Second quarter of the 1st century AD
Gold, lapis lazuli
0.9 x 0.4 cm
National Museum of Afghanistan
MK 04.40.107

72 Elements of an ornamental object

Afghanistan, Tillya-tepe, grave II
Second quarter of the 1st century AD
Gold, turquoise
20 x 3.1 cm
National Museum of Afghanistan
MK 04.40.108

This jewel, worn as a vertical band under the neck of the tunic, consists of a chain of gold discs inlaid with three turquoise droplets, surrounding a triangle cut out of the gold. Between the discs are dividers in the shape of double crescents decorated with hearts, also inlaid with turquoise. This type of feature, discs alternating with double crescents, can be used in a simple linked band to be sewn onto clothing, as here. It is also found as a jewel with pendants (cat. no. 73), a necklace (cat. no. 129) and finally as a purely graphic decorative motif (cat. no. 36). Examples of this have been found in the Saka-Parthian layers at Sirkap-Taxila (Marshall 1953, pl. 193, 56-58).



73 Components of an ornament

Afghanistan, Tillya-tepe, grave II
Second quarter of the 1st century AD
Gold, turquoise
W 18.3 cm
National Museum of Afghanistan
MK 04.40.95

This ornament is of the same type as the last, but with disc-pendants and the end crescents on each side end in volutes. It was probably used as a double-sided covering, possibly over the shoulder.

74 Bracteates in the form of a droplet

Afghanistan, Tillya-tepe, grave II
Second quarter of the 1st century AD
Gold
0.8 x 0.5 cm
National Museum of Afghanistan
MK 04.40.104



76 Two hair ornaments

Afghanistan, Tillya-tepe, grave II
Second quarter of the 1st century AD
Gold, turquoise, pearls, bronze (pin)
Ø of the roundels: 1.5 and 2.7 cm
National Museum of Afghanistan
MK 04.40.118

These ornaments consist of a pointed rod bearing a disc with a ribbed edge. The edge bears a turquoise with a fringe of gold threads strung with pearls. The use of pearls in an ornament of this kind seems to echo a saying of the Greek-born Roman historian Flavius Arrianus, who

wrote that pearls are three times as expensive as gold. The threads terminate in finely granulated pyramids. Below these hang gold roundels and a crescent, with a further three smooth discs suspended from it.

77 Pair of anklets

Afghanistan, Tillya-tepe, grave II
Second quarter of the 1st century AD
Gold
9.5 x 9.0 cm
National Museum of Afghanistan
MK 04.40.167

75 Two musicians

Afghanistan, Tillya-tepe, grave II
Second quarter of the 1st century AD
Gold
2.3 x 1.2 cm
National Museum of Afghanistan
MK 04.40.82

The figures sit with their legs crossed, plucking stringed instruments – lutes or *ouds* – in their right hands. Similar instruments are depicted on objects excavated at Khalchayan and Airtam in Uzbekistan. The visible navel seems to indicate nakedness. Perhaps this is the classical motif of musical cupids, like the cupid playing a lyre on a gilded copper appliqué from Takhti-Sangin in Tajikistan. Stringed instruments of this type are also depicted on *rhytons* (drinking beakers) from the ancient Parthian capital of Nisa in modern Turkmenistan, and in this catalogue (from Begram, cat. no. 207).

Music played an important role in Central Asia, particularly in the world of the nomads, a world of verbal history and heroic tales. These figures, more than simple musicians, could be reminiscent of the bards responsible for preserving the memory of the clan. One of the frozen graves at Pazyryk in the Altai Mountains of Siberia (Rudenko 1953, pl. LXXXVI, 1) contained not only drums but also a stringed instrument, fairly similar to the instrument depicted here. The Scythians from the west of the steppes have also left us the so-called diadem from Sakhnovka in the Ukraine, depicting a kneeling lyrist taking part in a ceremony (Schiltz 1994, fig. 135 C).





Necklace

Afghanistan, Tillya-tepe, grave II
Second quarter of the 1st century AD
Gold, organic material (wood?)
Ø of the beads: 1.8; 2.0; 2.4 cm
National Museum of Afghanistan
MK 04.40.111

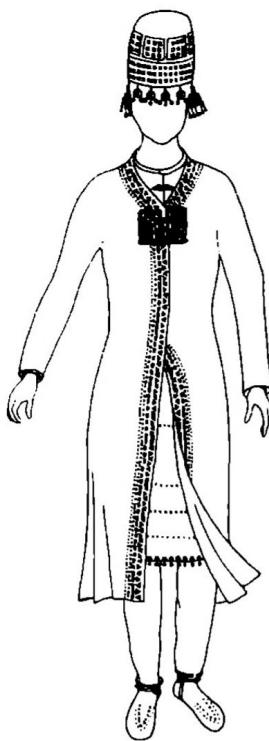
The necklace includes eleven hollow gold beads, made of two hemispheres carefully soldered together. Their surfaces are faceted and the seams of six of the beads show a double granulated line. The four black beads are made from an organic material which is neither bone nor ivory but possibly wood; these also consist

of two hemispheres with a narrow gold rim; they are stuck together with a clear adhesive. Two elongated gold beads with a granulated decoration function as closures.

[Detail of cat. no. 58 >](#)



Grave III



This grave, measuring 2.6 x 1.5 metres and orientated north-south, lay almost at the top of the mound. It was formed in one of the mud brick walls which separated the rooms of the former temple. The walls of the grave were perpendicular, with the exception of the eastern wall which was slightly inclined. Analysis of the organic residues on the upper surface suggests that the boards there were covered with leather, onto which small, rounded gold appliqués had been sewn (cat. no. 91 and 92).

Another possibility however is that the latter had been applied to a cloth used to wrap the coffin. Unlike the discs found in the other graves, which had only a small hole, those in this grave had a round fastening at the edge, like those from the graves at Begram and also similar to the discs on the conical head coverings and trousers worn by the leaders found at Dalverzin-tepe in Uzbekistan.

Traces of matting were found on the floor of the grave. The coffin, 40 to 50 centimetres high (and 2 m long x 65 cm wide) rested some 10-15 cm from the base on (wooden?) supports which have completely disappeared.

The entire contents of the grave (bones, ornaments and other items) had been gnawed and disturbed by rodents, who had dragged many items away, sometimes far into their burrows, leaving them both below the grave and above the ground. It seems very likely that the mound received its name 'Hill of Gold' because of the jewels removed from the graves in this way. The occupant of the grave was probably a woman, in view of the contents of the grave, and probably lay on her back. The head was to the north and rested on a golden plate. She probably wore a head-dress of fabric with gold bands and appliqués. Her jaw was held closed with a golden band. She wore hairpins (cat. no. 98), probably decorated with pendants, like the hair ornaments with crescents (cat. no. 87). The pendant with the horse motifs (cat. no. 97) probably adorned her face at the temples. A gold torque encircled her neck. The pieces of a second necklace lay scattered about (cat. no. 104).

A silver Chinese mirror lay on her breast. The various pair of clasps, including one decorated with images of warriors (cat. no. 79), which probably held together the panels of a heavy garment, the cupids riding dolphins (cat. no. 80) and the almond-shaped brooches (cat. no. 93) suggest that the woman was dressed in several layers of richly decorated clothing. It has not however been possible to determine with certainty the original location of four medallions, found in various places (cat. no. 84), nor that of the ornament with the image of Athena (cat. no. 105), the ear pendants (cat. nos. 81, 94, 100, 102 and 103) and the various bracteates (cat. nos. 82, 83 and 90) found together with various amulets and jewellery to be sewn or hung.

The young female had bracelets (cat. no. 85), three rings, one of which (cat. no. 101) was found outside the coffin, and anklets. The buckles and soles of her shoes, cut from gold sheet, were preserved (cat. no. 89). The silver Parthian coin (cat. no. 96), found in the area of the hips, was probably held in the woman's hand.

Three clay bowls were found outside the coffin at the head end. To the west lay various pieces of earthenware, silver and ivory from bottles and cosmetics containers, as well as a tiny gold ointment box (cat. no. 86). To the southwest corner lay a second mirror with an ivory handle, a round gold box with a lid (cat. no. 88), whose weight was inscribed on it in Greek script, under which the coin of Tiberius (cat. no. 95) had been placed.

Also close by was the ring already mentioned (cat. no. 101), decorated with a depiction of a ritual offering.

Judging by its contents, which had been considerably disturbed but certainly included nearly five thousand gold objects, this was an exceptionally rich grave.

Pair of clasps decorated with warriors

Afghanistan, Tillya-tepe, grave III
Second quarter of the 1st century AD
Gold
9.0 x 6.3 cm
National Museum of Afghanistan
MK 04.40.245

Both of these clasps, one with two hooks and the other with two loops, were covered with a smooth plate to the rear. They display almost symmetrical tableaux, with only minor differences. Within a rectangular frame of plant and animal motifs a warrior is striding forward, a lance in one hand and a shield in the other. He has the musculature of an adult male, but the long curling hair reaching to the shoulders – like originally was/were that of the youth on the Ai Khanum relief – are those of a young *ephebe* (cat. no. 35).

Some elements of the man's weapons are the same as those worn by Greek or Graeco-Bactrian

soldiers, but there are a few variations in the detail which are of overriding importance. The helmet has a rippled edge, a snaking feather serving as a crest and a chinstrap, similar to that of a Macedonian or a later traditional Graeco-Bactrian helmet. However it also has a bull's ear, similar to that seen on depictions of Alexander the Great and on the coinage of Bactrian Kings such as Eucratides (second century BC). The horn which normally accompanies this in depictions has disappeared, although it may be shown instead of the ear on the left-hand clasp, or in the round recess on top of the helmet. Another detail appearing on the coins of Eucratides are the folds across the neck: these are part of a very long garment, held on the shoulders by a clasp in the form of a crescent, and looking like a *chlamys* (soldier's cloak) or *paludamentum* (a cloak worn by a general engaged in warfare). Streaming ribbons are also shown, marking the ends of a royal diadem like the helmet ribbons of Bactrian rulers. The upper body, with the ribcage and the navel

shown, is not naked but is clad with a breast-plate following the form of the body, as was worn by kings and Caesars. This armour covers the upper body to the hips, and is shaped so as better to protect the vulnerable areas of the trunk. The point of attachment at the shoulders is covered by the cloak: the fringe of lambrequin or toothed hemming at the shoulders is however clearly shown by means of rectangular recesses, with a further two rows of lambrequins under the under the breastplate below which the fabric of the clothing reappears. Below the breast is a belt, tied at the front, another emblem of power. On his left the warrior holds a sword with a pommel in the form of a griffon's head, similar to the example in ivory from the Temple of the Oxus (Litvinsky 2001, pl. 62). In defiance of the laws of symmetry the sword is held on the correct side in both appliqués, namely on the left. Only the handle can therefore be seen on the left-hand clasp, that has the shape of a *carnyx* (trumpet like an animal head). The weapon is attached to





a sword-belt which runs diagonally across the trunk, below the navel. The belt is attached to the sheath with a typical vertical clip, which can be seen being worn by warriors on the bone plate from Orlat in Uzbekistan and has also been found among the Sarmatians in the west: some examples are in jade, pointing to an Asiatic origin. The man wore short, laced boots revealing a toe. Two ribbons bind his calves, but these may only have been added as a pretext to some inlay work. The ground on which the man stands is richly in an architectural manner: there are rectangular recessed tiles, lozenges and dots suggesting decorative bead-and-reel and egg-shaped recesses alternating with darts.

But the 'dragon-lions' with their puckered muzzles on the Chinese model, and the plant motifs with birds (grouse?) at the corners, give the 'columns' forming the frame an animalistic aesthetic which is completely alien to Greek art, but sits very well among very aesthetic of the art of the steppes?

80 A pair of clasps. Cupids on a dolphin

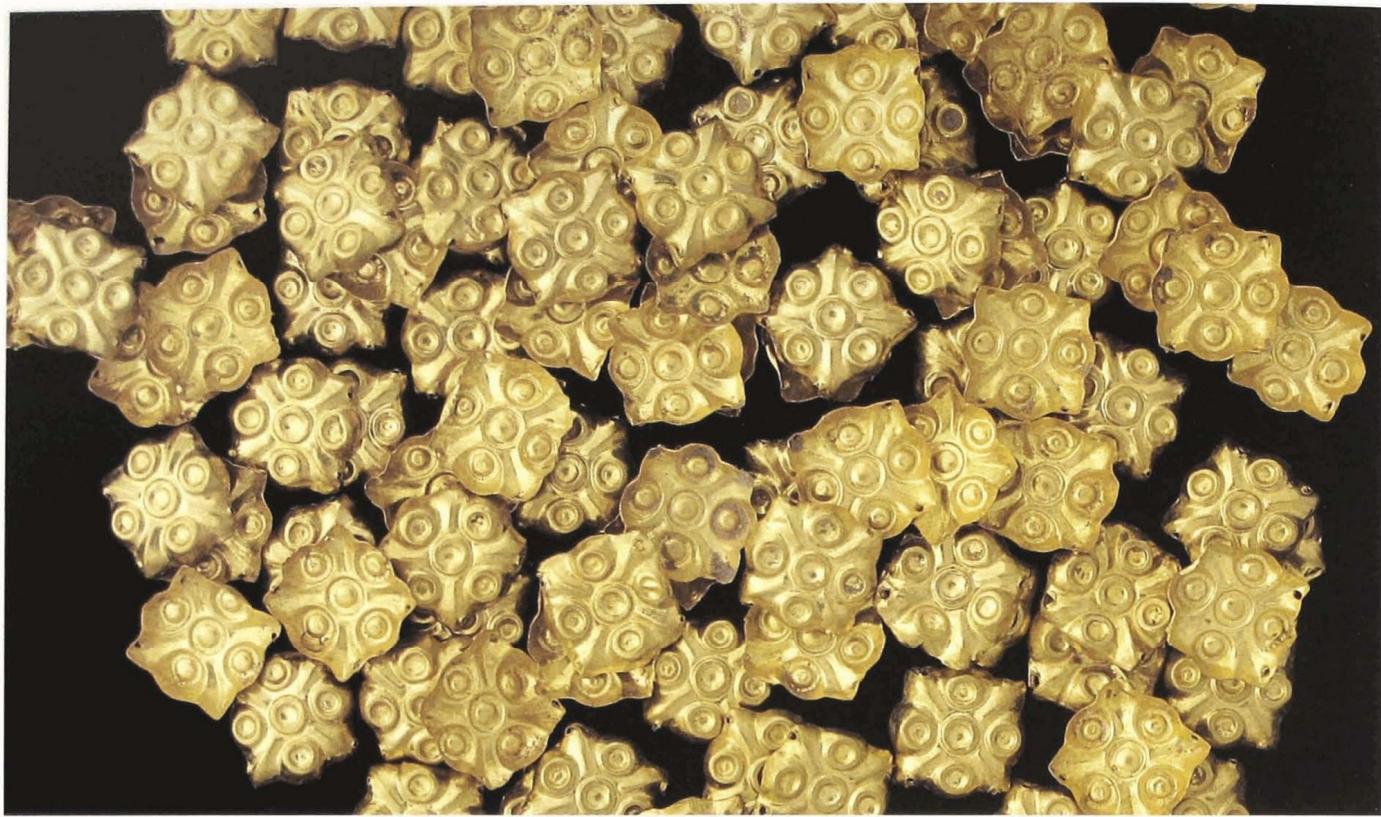
Afghanistan, Tillya-tepe, grave III
Second quarter of the 1st century AD
Gold, turquoise, mother of pearl
4.2 x 4.9 cm
National Museum of Afghanistan
MK 04.40.110

81 Ear pendants decorated with garnets

Afghanistan, Tillya-tepe, grave III
Second quarter of the 1st century AD
Gold, garnet
L 1.8 cm (without the disc); Ø 0.9 cm
National Museum of Afghanistan
MK 04.40.237

These clasps are comparable in type with those from grave II (cat. no. 59). However the cupid figures here have neither wings nor a crossed decoration on the breast. They hold their upper bodies triumphantly to the rear, their arms widely spread, the knees drawn up and the waist clearly shown. They give a somewhat airy impression, reinforced by the space below their elbows. Their postures are not entirely symmetrical: the upper body of one is shown frontally, the other is seen in semi-profile on his back. Both of these figures held an object in their hands into which a coloured stone could be fitted. The 'quiff', the fins, the tail and the scales of the 'dolphins' have retained their turquoise inlay work. The eye is represented by a bead. Next to the eye is a decorative mark resembling the barbels of a catfish.





82 **Bracteates with disc-shaped decoration**

Afghanistan, Tillya-tepe, grave III
Second quarter of the 1st century AD
Gold
 1.1×0.1 cm
National Museum of Afghanistan
MK 04.40.206

83 **Heart-shaped bracteates, kinked in the middle**

Afghanistan, Tillya-tepe, grave III
Second quarter of the 1st century AD
Gold
 0.8×0.8 cm
National Museum of Afghanistan
MK 04.40.205

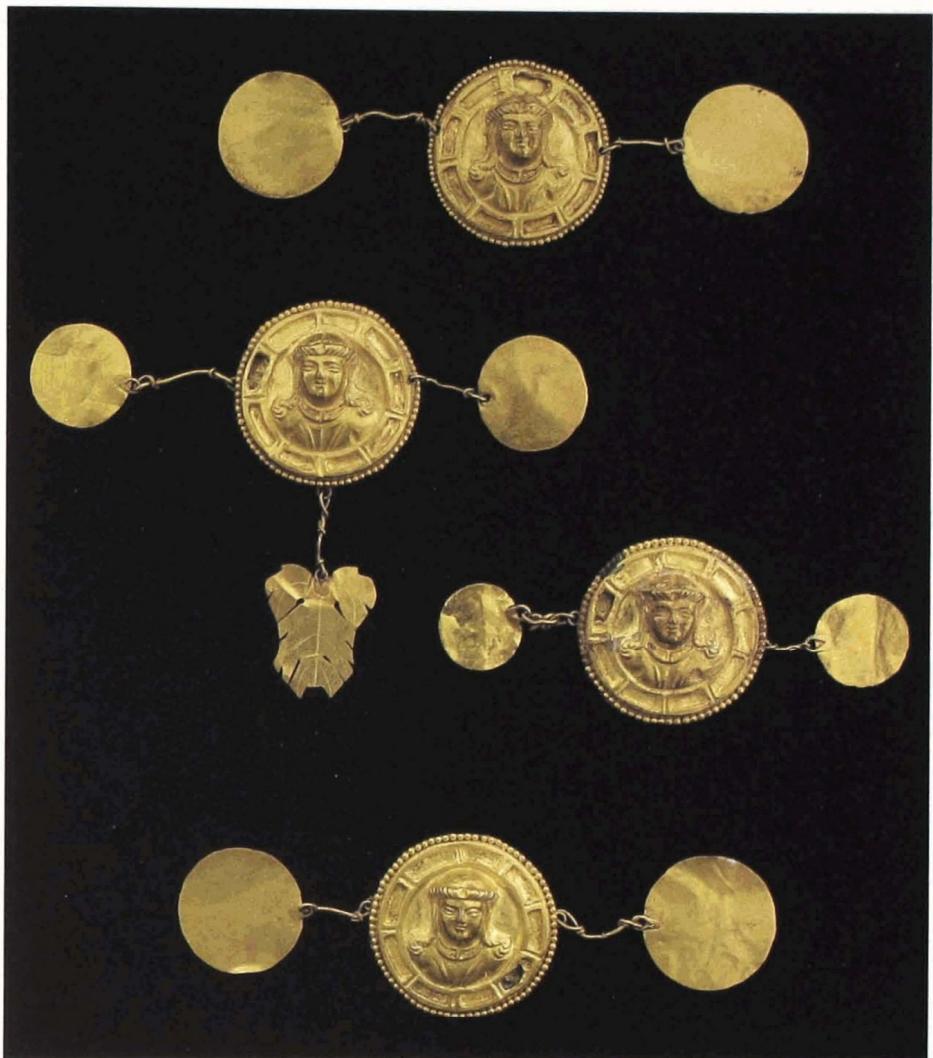


84 Four medallions

Afghanistan, Tillya-tepe, grave III
Second quarter of the 1st century AD
Gold
Ø 2.6 and 1.6 cm; L 4.0 cm
National Museum of Afghanistan
MK 04.40.423

The head and part of the upper body of a man can be seen on these identical medallions: he wears a garment with two panels (a type of kaftan) and a broad neck torque. Vertical fixing tubes are mounted on the rear of the medallions.

The man has a short neck, a broad face with high cheekbones, a heavy chin, narrow mouth, prominent slit eyes, pronounced brows and a low forehead. His hair is parted in the middle, with a rolled lock fastened to his head and long curls falling asymmetrically over his shoulders. These external characteristics call up associations with the representation of the young Dionysus (recognisable from the ivy), shown on a *phalera* of gilded bronze found in Tajikistan in the region of Dushanbe.



85 A pair of bracelets

Afghanistan, Tillya-tepe, grave III
Second quarter of the 1st century AD
Gold
L 23.1 cm
National Museum of Afghanistan
MK 04.40.166





86 ^ Cosmetics pot with lid

Afghanistan, Tillya-tepe, grave III
Second quarter of the 1st century AD
Gold
Ø 2.0 cm
National Museum of Afghanistan
MK 04.40.199



87 1 Crescent with three pendants

Afghanistan, Tillya-tepe, grave III
Second quarter of the 1st century AD
Gold
5.8 x 7.3 cm
National Museum of Afghanistan
MK 04.40.234

88 > Round box with lid, bearing Greek inscription

Afghanistan, Tillya-tepe, grave III
Second quarter of the 1st century AD
Gold
H 5.5 cm; Ø 5.0 cm
National Museum of Afghanistan
MK 04.40.169



With its rounded shape and its lid with a pomegranate knob, secured with a chain, this little box takes the form of the traditional Greek *pyxis* (earthenware) or *cista* (clay or metal) casket.

The lid and the sides are decorated with plant leaves and three-lobed petals, from which pistils with rounded stamens protrude. It is possible that the stamens were intended for inlay work.

On the base, made separately and then soldered

to the box, we can see three concentric rings and an engraved inscription in Greek script (CTA E/B); these indicate the weight of the box according to the Ionic system, which used the

letters of the Greek alphabet in sequence in a decimal system so that E = 5 and B = 2. This means five staters and two drachmas. Converting that weight to the metric system,

a stater (tetradrachm) comes to 15.6 grams and a drachma is 3.9 grams (see also cat. no. 123) (Bernard 2000, p. 1427, note 144).

An interesting comparison with this object is provided by silver boxes of similar shape found in the Sarmatian grave in Kossika on the Volga.

89 Pair of 'shoe soles'

Afghanistan, Tillya-tepe, grave III

Second quarter of the 1st century AD

Gold

22.5 x 8.7 cm

National Museum of Afghanistan

MK 04.40.174

These soles, cut from thin gold sheet and with attachment holes both on the top and at the heels, were clearly not made to be used for walking. The question is whether they were intended purely as grave decorations, as can be seen in Egypt and elsewhere. This appears not to be the case: in the mounted world of the nomads, where a person on foot might be looked at without any consideration, where the elite sat on carpets and not the bare ground, the wearing of costly or decorated soles was a sign of an aristocratic way of life. For example the boots of cloth and supple leather found in the frozen nomad graves in the Altai Mountains of Siberia (Kurgan 2 at Pazyryk), which had pyrites sewn on the soles as decoration (Rudenko 1953, pl. XXV, 2) or other forms of ornamentation (*ibid.*, pl. XCIII, 3). The torque of gold and turquoise from Kobyakovo in southern Russia (Schiltz 2001, no. 240) shows a man seated in the eastern manner, with the soles of the feet outwards.



90 Round bracteates with turquoise and a granulated rim

Afghanistan, Tillya-tepe, grave III

Second quarter of the 1st century AD

Gold, turquoise, pyrites

Ø 0.6 cm

National Museum of Afghanistan

MK 04.40.209





91 ▲ Round pendants

Afghanistan, grave III
Second quarter of the 1st century AD
Gold
Ø 3.0 cm
National Museum of Afghanistan
MK 04.40.273

92 ↗ Round pendants

Afghanistan, Tillya-tepe, grave III
Second quarter of the 1st century AD
Gold
Ø 3.0 cm
National Museum of Afghanistan
MK 04.40.262

93 > Two almond-shaped clasps

Afghanistan, Tillya-tepe, grave III
Second quarter of the 1st century AD
Gold, turquoise
H 2.2 cm
National Museum of Afghanistan
MK 04.40.231



94 >> Elongated heart-shaped pendants

Afghanistan, Tillya-tepe, grave III
Second quarter of the 1st century AD
Gold
1.8 x 1.0 cm
National Museum of Afghanistan
MK 04.40.187



95 ^ Roman coin of Tiberius

Afghanistan, Tillya-tepe, grave III

14-37 AD

Gold

Ø 1.9 cm

National Museum of Afghanistan

MK 04.40.426

Obverse: head of Emperor Tiberius with laurel wreath, turned to the right. Inscription to the right: TI CAESAR DIVI; left: AUG F AUGUSTUS.

Reverse: seated female figure, facing right; her right arm leans on a staff, the left hand holds a bough. To either side the inscription PONTIF[EX] MAXIM[US].

The female figure on the reverse of the coin is probably Livia, the mother of Tiberius and the spouse of Augustus, here depicted as goddess

of peace. The coin was struck in Lugdunum (Lyon) in Gaul during the reign of Tiberius (14-37 AD); more precise dating is not possible as yet (Amandry et al. 2003).

This Tiberian *aureus*, the oldest Roman coin yet found in Afghanistan, did not arrive here by land but rather by sea, via the south of India. Many coins of this type have been found in central India, while a Tiberian *denarius* was found in Taxila in the valley of the Indus. This coin provides an important clue in the dating of the necropolis.

96 ^ Parthian coin of Mithridates II

Afghanistan, Tillya-tepe, grave III

123-88 BC

Gold

Ø 2.2 cm

National Museum of Afghanistan

MK 04.40.172

Obverse: head of a king with beard and moustache, diadem on his head, in profile and turned to the left.

Reverse: Figure in Parthian dress, seated on a throne and facing right, the right arm outstretched and holding a bow. Inscription above: BASILEOS, right: BASILEÔN, below: MEGALOU; left, on two lines: ARSAKOU EPIPHANOUS.

Coin of the Parthian King Mithridates II (123-88 BC), perhaps struck at Nisa.



97 Hair ornament with protomes of two horses

Afghanistan, Tillya-tepe, grave III
Second quarter of the 1st century AD
Gold, turquoise, lapis lazuli, carnelian, pyrites
8.6 x 4.6 cm
National Museum of Afghanistan
MK 04.40.163

An appliqué in the form of two horse protomes, placed opposite one another, the base of the necks touching, is soldered to the triangular central section, with inlay work in pyrites and a granulated decoration. Their extended forelegs rest on a broad rectangular recess; below this are further rounded recesses which once held alternating turquoises and gold balls.

The ears, manes, eyes, withers and hooves were decorated with polychrome inlay work. Below the ornament hung flat roundels on chains, with two pendants on either side, consisting of three hearts and a cut out leaf.

The motif of animals shown as protome was in use in Antiquity and later in the East. Examples include the bronzes from the western Persian province of Luristan and the column capitals from Persepolis, the Greek island of Delos and Mathura in India. The choice of horses was clearly a matter of status in a traditional mounted society: other examples pointing to this include a comb with opposed horse heads discovered with the skeleton of a woman at Koktepe in Uzbekistan, close to her right hand (Rapin 2001, fig. 10, no. 15). A comparable image

can be seen on a leather saddle ornament from grave 5 at Pazyryk, Siberia (Rudenko 1953, pl. CV, 2). The only difference is that the horses here are not shown in side view but rather in the Greek manner in half profile: the two hooves with recesses can be seen clearly, as can the two holes for the nostrils above the half opened mouth, the top of the forehead, and both eyes and ears. This scientific perspective, unknown to the nomads, was as it were denied by the clumsy albeit very expressive representation of the two excessively short front legs, seeming to be attached directly to the neck.

98 **Two hairpins with a rosette**

Afghanistan, Tillya-tepe, grave III

Second quarter of the 1st century AD

Gold, bronze

Ø 7.5 cm

National Museum of Afghanistan

MK 04.40.165



99 **Comb**

Afghanistan, Tillya-tepe, grave III

Second quarter of the 1st century AD

Ivory

W 5.0 cm

National Museum of Afghanistan

MK 04.40.241



Combs have been found in other nomad graves, including a recent find in the grave of a woman in Koktepe, Uzbekistan (halfway through the 1st century AD) (Rapin 2001, fig. 10), but this comb was the only example from the graves at Tillya-tepe.

Only the upper part of the comb was found, albeit in poor condition. However enough remains for some conclusions to be drawn: the form with its rounded corners, the ivory it is made from and the stylistic characteristics of the fine engraving on both sides indicate that the comb came originally from India. The only visible decorative element is a male figure in the centre, reaching forward somewhat and with an apparently shaved head put forward. Apart from the ivory toilet articles found at Begram, another similar comb was discovered at Dalverzin-tepe in the north of Bactria, now part of Uzbekistan (Pugachenkova 1978, fig. 65-87).

100 **Cabochon (polished stone) in an oval setting**

Afghanistan, Tillya-tepe, grave III

Second quarter of the 1st century AD

Gold, haematite

2.2 x 1.7 cm

National Museum of Afghanistan

MK 04.40.256



101 **Ring with an intaglio, depicting a ritual offering**

Afghanistan, Tillya-tepe, grave III

Second quarter of the 1st century AD

Gold, turquoise

2.3 x 2.0 cm

National Museum of Afghanistan

MK 04.40.227

The gold ring is set with a precious stone displaying a standing figure, clad in a short tunic and with the right arm leaning on a branch. An object, probably an altar, is shown in front of his left hand, which holds a leafy branch. To his right stands a low pillar decorated with a garland. The silhouette of the man, the *thrysus* staff (proper to the cult of Dionysus) and the pillar with the double plinth and capital are clear indications that this is a religious image or a representation of a ritual sacrifice on the Greek model.



102 **Gem showing a hump-backed ox**

Afghanistan, Tillya-tepe, grave III

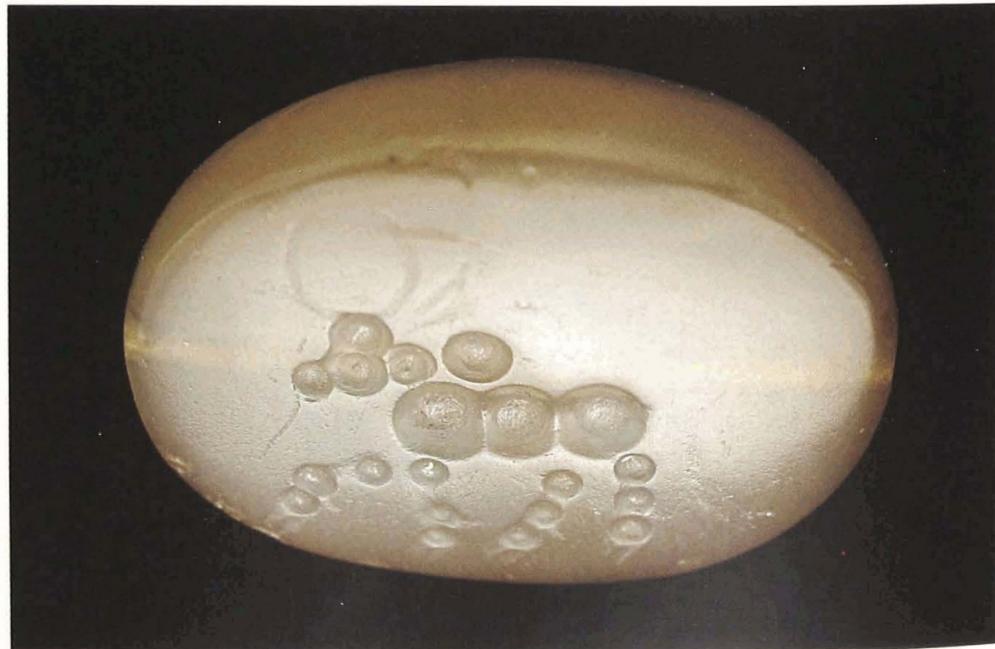
Second quarter of the 1st century AD

Nephrite jade

2.1 x 1.6 x 1.0 cm

National Museum of Afghanistan

MK 04.40.242





103 Shark tooth pendants

Afghanistan, Tillya-tepe grave III
Second quarter of the 1st century AD
Gold, shark teeth
5.1 x 1.1 cm; 2.7 x 0.7 cm
National Museum of Afghanistan
MK 04.40.247

These are two fossilised teeth of a shark (*Odontaspidae*) possibly from the same jaw (we are indebted to F Poplin for his analysis). According to a later tradition these so-called petrified snake-tongues or *glossopetrae* were deemed to possess all kinds of magical powers.

104 Necklace

Afghanistan, Tillya-tepe, grave III
Second quarter of the 1st century AD
Gold
Ø of beads 2.1 x 1.9 and 1.6 cm
National Museum of Afghanistan
MK 04.40.162

The necklace consists of eight round beads with repetitive engraved decoration, five smooth rounded beads and two elongated beads forming the fastening.



105 Ornament with an image of Athena

Afghanistan, Tillya-tepe, grave III
Second quarter of the 1st century AD
Gold
1.6 x 1.2 x 0.6 cm
National Museum of Afghanistan
MK 04.40.197



A standing Athena is depicted on an oval field, with a helmet with chinstrap on her head. Bracelets adorn her extended left arm, as well as a veil which extends behind her knees to the right arm, emerging below the shield. The lance, partly hidden by the shield, slants across the figure of the goddess. On the rear are four loops allowing the ornament to be attached to clothing or worn as a pendant. If it is not a copy or imitation this may have originally been the stone in a seal ring. That can at least be inferred from the form and flat surface of the object, the name of the goddess, written in reverse, and above all from the significant wear on the engraved surface.

Grave IV



This grave was set in the middle of the western wall of the terrace. It was dug inside the top of the former temple wall. The grave was 2.7 metres long, 1.3 metres wide and 1.8 metres deep, and orientated north-south. At a depth of around 40 centimetres the archaeologists made a remarkable discovery: the skull and bones of a horse. This might suggest the remains of a funeral feast, but because no pottery was discovered and only the head and forelegs of the animal were found it seems more likely that the horse was a sacrificial offering, perhaps placed in the grave to watch over his master and to be ready for his use if needed. This custom has been described by such diverse authors as Herodotus (IV, 72), Ibn Battuta and Simon de Saint-Quentin (Richard, 1965, p. 50), but is also associated with a continuing tradition in Siberia, and in the weakened form of the *bæx fældisyn*, (the 'consecration of the horse'), among the Ossets in the Caucasus (Dumézil 1978, p. 250).

The skeleton lay on its back with its head to the north, in a wooden coffin 2.2 metres long, 0.7 m broad and 0.75 metres high, covered with red leather, with painted motifs in black and white and sewn with gold bracteates. The coffin rested on supports around 15 centimetres from the floor of the grave, which was also covered with leather.

The deceased was a tall man, between 1.7 and 1.85 metres. His head rested on a grooved golden plate (cat. no. 123) which, according to the archaeologists, itself rested on a silk cushion. His jaw was fastened with a double chin band. The man wore a head covering to which were attached a golden wild ram (cat. no. 108) and a golden tree (cat. no. 121). The man's most notable ornaments were a necklace consisting of two twisted threads with a cameo (cat. no. 116), a braided gold belt with nine medallions (cat. no. 107) and a number of bracelets. His clothing was removed layer by layer and carefully examined. In the opinion of the archaeologist responsible (Sarianidi 1989), the man was clad in a shirt and a short kaf-

tan, tied to the left, with trousers below this, but it is more probable that he wore a long single breasted jacket (Yatsenko 1989 and 2001). Thousands of bracteates (cat. no. 117) and appliqués were sewn onto his clothes, the fabric of gold threads and pearls bearing large decorative motifs on the most visible areas, the upper body and the legs.

His footwear, probably boots or bootees of supple leather, as can be seen on the sculpted depictions of Parthian rulers and the images of Kushan kings at Surkh Kotal in Afghanistan and Mathura in India, was beautifully decorated with buckles in gold and turquoise (cat. no. 106) and golden rosettes with – once again, in turquoise against a golden background – a heart motive (cat. no. 118). The gold appliqués (cat. nos. 109, 124) were probably the ends of straps attached to the footwear or to the gaiters covering the legs. However they may also have been attached to the belt.

An Indian medallion – not a coin – lay at the level of the ribcage (cat. no. 119). An intaglio was also found close to the body (cat. no. 120), with an image of the Heraclides, the sons of Heracles, casting lots to determine which kingdom each would hold. The buckles (cat. nos. 110 to 112) and shield-shaped appliqués (cat. nos. 125 and 126) found on the lower body were interpreted by the excavators as elements of a harness, placed symbolically over the body of the deceased. However it seems more likely that these were components of a sword-belt or other system for attaching weapons: the same applies to the ornament, which is probably the end of strap (cat. no. 122). This seems all the more likely as these objects were all found set out symmetrically on opposite sides of the body, like the weapons. The deceased, the only male found in the six graves, had a number of magnificent weapons, clearly indicating his status as a leader. Apart from a long sword at his left side, comparable with an example found in the north of Bactria (Mandelstam 1975, pl. XXX, 1), the man had a dagger on his right, its handle covered with gold, inserted in a four-lobed sheath decorated with gold and turquoise (cat. nos. 113 and 114). To his left he had an equally beautiful sheath containing a short dagger with an ivory handle (cat. no. 115) and two other smaller daggers, placed head to tail. Apart from these weapons there were two bows with quivers containing arrow-heads. These bows, long-distance weapons characteristic of the nomads and considered by them as a symbol of kingly power, lay outside the coffin, as did a further rather surprising object, which nonetheless matched the status of the deceased, namely a leather-clad seat on X-shaped metal legs. This was both a handy folding stool to take on campaign, and also a dignifying *sella curulis*, a kind of mobile throne, on the whole.

The regal neck chain, the belt, the golden *phiale* or libation bowl, the horseman's dagger in its ceremonial, ostentatious version, the bow as symbol of power, for a more high fashion 'Parthian shot', the throne and finally the horse: all this points to a horseman who passed from cavalry to chivalry, and one who felt it important to emphasise his high position through the emblems of settled kingship, without renouncing his pride in his nomadic origins.

106 Boot buckles decorated with an image of a carriage drawn by dragons

Afghanistan, Tillya-tepe, grave IV

Second quarter of the 1st century AD

Gold, turquoise, carnelian

Ø 5.5 cm; H 1.1 cm

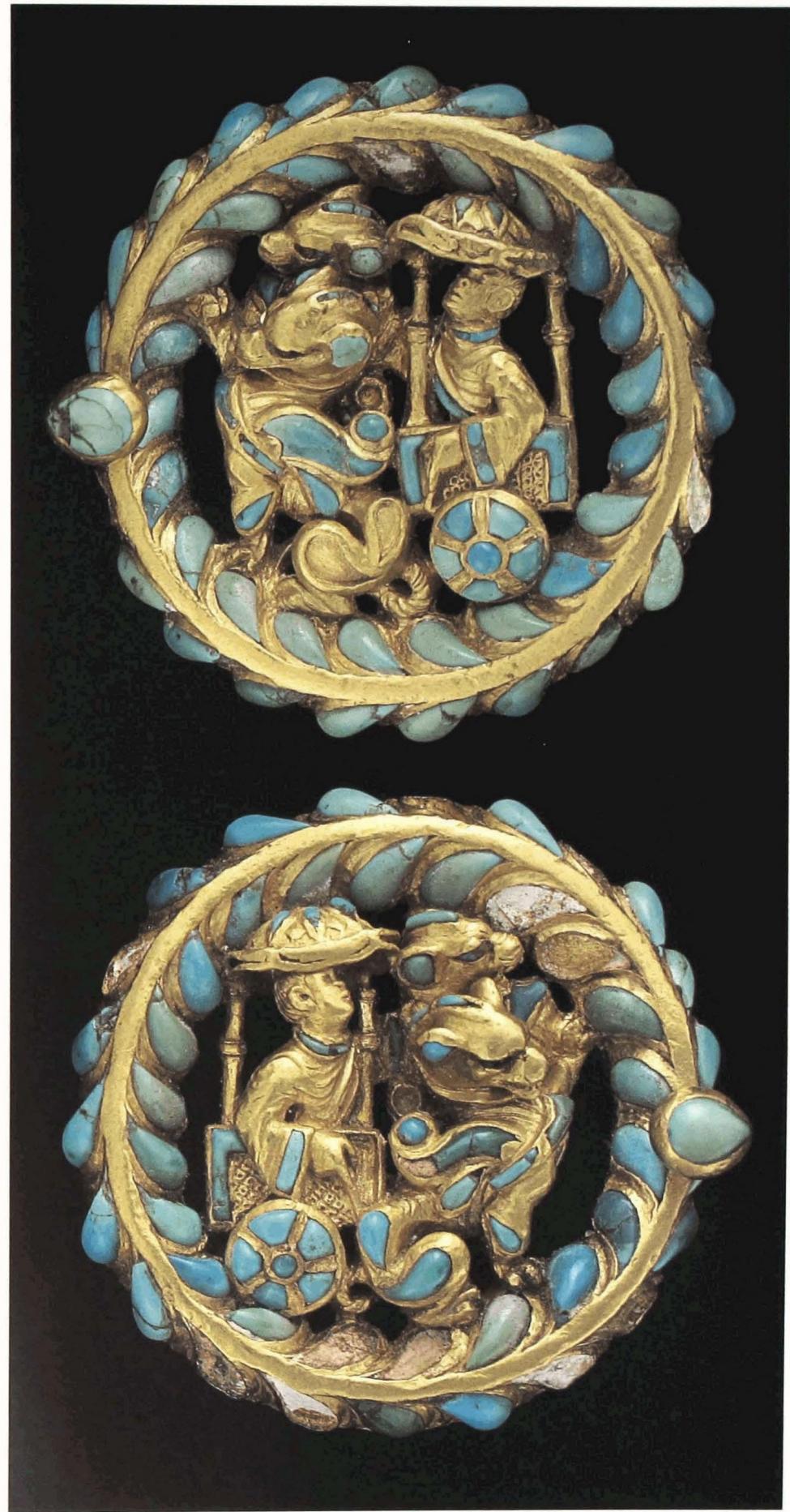
National Museum, Tashkent

MK 04.40.383



The perimeter of each buckle is decorated with a double row of rotating turquoise droplets. The location of the attachment hook is decorated with a large almond-shaped turquoise. The tableau in the central panel showing a man sitting in a chariot drawn by two mythical creatures is repeated in mirrored symmetry. He has a rather elongated head, tipped back somewhat, his ear clearly visible, the eye small and round; the mouth has clearly depicted lips and seems half-opened. The neck opening of his robe, draped in the Greek manner – rather than a torque – is indicated by a border of turquoise, as is the hem of the cloak and the end of the sleeve. One arm raised, the second bent, he holds the reins. His lower body is hidden by the sides of the chariot, in one version decorated with lozenges, in the other with roundels. The chariot appears to be in a woven material, while the uprights of the round bâdchin look like bamboo. The traditional motif of a king processing under a parasol occurs at Persepolis, while from Ai Khanum we have the depiction of Cybele (cat. no. 23), standing under a similar parasol in a chariot drawn by lions, but in both cases the parasol is held by a man. This two-wheeled chariot is drawn by two winged, feline animals with curving foreheads, raising one clawed foot and showing their teeth. They are kept in check with turquoise reins running across their chests. Whether it is the mythical creatures or the strange chariot, something about this image calls up associations with the Far East. This type of chariot, a light-weight model with two wheels, did indeed occur in China at the time of the Han Dynasty (206 BC-220 AD), and depictions have been found in petroglyphs at Chanyn Chad in Mongolia. More important still was the discovery of a chariot with a ribbed parasol, found by a team from the Musée Guimet during excavations in a Xiongnu nomad necropolis at Gol Mod in Mongolia.

The buckle could be fastened at the inner ankle using four loops at the rear, and there was also





a band which passed around the ankle and under the foot, and was made fast using a strap tongue. A similar gold buckle with a hook was found at Dalverzin-tepe in Uzbekistan (Pougatchenkova 1978, fig. 80). In this case the impression of the material with the help of which the buckle was cast can clearly be seen on the unplated rear part of the object, evidence of a very specialised technique also applied in making diverse objects in the Siberian collection of Peter the Great, held at the Hermitage in St Petersburg (Rudenko 1962, pl. XXV to XXVII).

107 Belt

Afghanistan, Tillya-tepe, grave IV
Second quarter of the 1st century AD
Gold
97.5 x 2.0 cm
National Museum of Afghanistan
MK 04.40.384

The belt consists of a flexible band of eight braided gold chains, alternating with nine medallions. Fitting marks (Greek letters?) can be seen on the rear of the medallions. Each medallion has a granulated edge and heart-shaped interlocked recesses, each showing the same tableau: a figure with a beaker in his hand sits, leaning over backwards, on the back of a panther, his elbow resting on the creature's head. These images are in a pronounced relief and are all made separately and then soldered on. On five of them the animal walks to the right, while on four he walks to the left, so that they will all meet at the two medallions which grip one another to provide the fastening. While the general arrangement is identical there are differences in the details. The panther's attitude, the decoration of the saddle-cloth placed over the creature's back and the curves of its tail vary, as do the features of the figure sitting on the animal. He wears a torque and his hair in a high knot in each image, but on two of the medallions the hair is held in place with a crown formed from rounded recesses, reminiscent of the hair of Dionysus on the clasps from grave VI (cat. no. 136). Like the god, the figure on the panther here is clad in a short tunic exposing his knees and his boots, decorated with palmettes. He also holds a beaker with two handles, which reproduces the form of a *kantharos* (a Dionysiac beaker) on the third medallion from the left. Even though he is not wearing

his characteristic fawn skin there would be no doubt in the mind of any Greek: this is Dionysus, riding side-saddle on a panther, as he is shown for instance on a mosaic in Pella in Macedonia, and in particular on the island of Delos. However there is one confusing detail which seems to invalidate the Dionysus hypothesis, namely the two-fingered gesture made by the person: milk seems to flow from 'his' breast, which is nevertheless covered, to be caught by the beaker. The gaze of the figure on most of the medallions is clearly directed towards this particularly feminine gesture. Is this perhaps a case of confusion, mixing or combination of different images, namely Dionysus seated on a panther, the Bactrian goddess Nana seated on her lion, and the well-known fertility goddesses who makes the same gesture? Especially puzzling is the comparison with the woman as source of nourishment, seen on a Graeco-Bactrian terracotta from Susa (Iran; Louvre Sb 3800 and Ghirshman 1963, fig. 433), which is only slightly older than this belt. Equally confusing is that the so-called 'Dionysus' on one of the medallions is shown with a slim neck, fine features, the hair-knot, and knees which are closer together and more covered, giving 'him' something of the appearance of the goddess Artemis. Caution therefore continues to be advisable: the questions raised by this image are not all answered by the notion of exchanging the male and the female.

Whatever the truth may be, and no matter that the Roman historian Quintus Curtius (III, 3, 17) may have said about the solid gold belt of the Persian king Darius III that it 'looked like the belt of a woman', this object itself does clearly bear a masculine signature. The belt differs from the sword-belt whose components were found (cat. nos. 109, 122 and 124), and it is among the signs of royal power. This is confirmed by images of kings from Mathura in India and Hatra in Iraq, and the most similar example, the belt of King Valgash from Hatra (Brentjes 1989, fig. 8). One of its medallions represents Nana on her lion. The image of a similar belt was found in Palmyra in Syria (Tanabe 1986, pl. 374) showing six of a probable total of nine medallions, linked by three chains. Finally there are the two Parthian medallions forming a pair, their perimeters inlaid with turquoise, which are held one in the British Museum and the other in the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York (Ghirshman 1962, fig. 112a).





108 Standing ram

Afghanistan, Tillya-tepe, grave IV
 Second quarter of the 1st century AD
 Gold
 5.2 x 4.0 cm
 National Museum of Afghanistan
 MK 04.40.399

It seems as though the animal is standing on his four feet keeping watch, with his nose straight ahead and his hooves flat on the rings. This would allow it to be used as a head adornment. The ram has the large grooved horns characteristic of the mouflon breed (identification by C Jarrige, confirmed by F Poplin, to whom we are indebted). The animal serving as a model here may have been the urial (*ovis vignei*) or Severtzov's argali (*ovis ammon severtzovi*) which is often confused with it (Caprinae 1999, p. 6). There are different varieties of mouflon occurring in Central Asia, which can only be identified using DNA. Behind the horns is a curious tube, which would allow an ornament to be attached, possibly of

organic material such as wood or leather. This seems to be the upper part of a high head covering as often seen among the nomads, such as the example from the 7th century BC showing a deer, from the princely grave at Arzhan in Tuva or a more recent example from the Altai, where the crests of felt helmets decorated with wooden statues with leather horns have been preserved because they were frozen (Polosmak 2001, pl. XIX). Apart from Siberia these also occur in Kazakhstan: atop the high hat of the man from Issyk sat a golden mouflon, associated as in the present example with the image of a tree (cat. no. 121). The Siberian collection of Peter the Great in the Hermitage in St Petersburg also includes various gold images which may have had the same function (Rudenko 1962, pl. XXII).

But while the function of the animal points to its use among the nomad leaders, the realistic manner of representation, the detail of the muzzle, the beard and the wool, the depiction of the sexual organs and the precise delineation of the hooves are quite atypical of the art of the

steppes, and point to an origin within a workshop working to a completely different tradition.

109 Two languettes showing a panther

Afghanistan, Tillya-tepe, grave IV
 Second quarter of the 1st century AD
 Gold
 4.0 x 1.2 cm
 National Museum of Afghanistan
 MK 04.40.393



Strap decorations

The six protruding buttons are hollow. Remnants of organic materials are still present on the inside, probably from a leather band held in place by a thin piece of gold covering the rear surface at a slant. These are probably decorations used on a sword-belt from which weapons would be hung, rather than *phalerae* attached to horse tack.

The illustrations are of a mythical creature, rolled up and biting its own tail (cat. no. 110), three monsters with long, doubled-over backbones and the heads of predators with powerful beaks, bumpy foreheads and long, flattened ears (cat. no. 111) and two other more or less similar monsters (cat. no. 112). Traces of wear can be seen, indicating that the objects were used over a considerable period.

Similar buttons are also found in the Siberian collection of Peter the Great in the Hermitage in St Petersburg (Rudenko 1962, pl. XXIII, 24, 25, 28 to 31, 34), where they are termed *phalerae*, but there is no archaeological context to permit one to decide.

110 Strap decoration with a coiled mythical creature

Afghanistan, Tillya-tepe, grave IV
Second quarter of the 1st century AD
Gold
Ø 2.6 cm; H 1.2 cm
National Museum of Afghanistan
MK 04.40.416

112 Two strap decorations showing a coiled mythical animal

Afghanistan, Tillya-tepe, grave IV
Second quarter of the 1st century AD
Gold
Ø 2.2 and 2.1 cm; H 1.8 and 1.7 cm
National Museum of Afghanistan
MK 04.40.417

111 Strap decorations showing a coiled mythical animal

Afghanistan, Tillya-tepe, grave IV
Second quarter of the 1st century AD
Gold
Ø 1.8 cm
National Museum of Afghanistan
MK 04.40.390



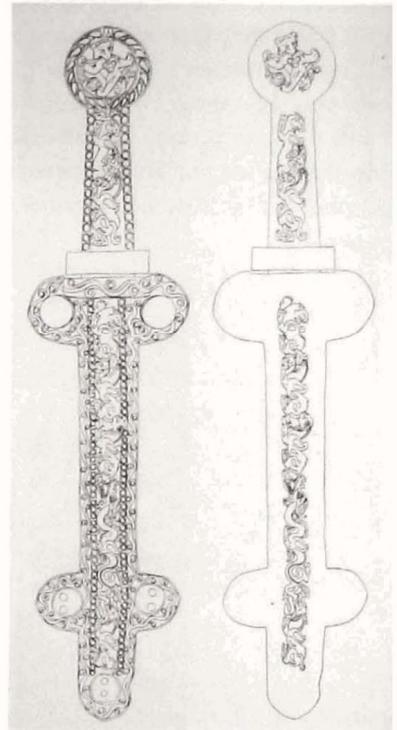
113 Cover of a dagger sheath

Afghanistan, Tillya-tepe, grave IV
 Second quarter of the 1st century AD
 Gold, turquoise
 23.5 x 9 cm
 National Museum of Afghanistan
 MK 04.40.382

The gold covering, which enclosed a leather sheath, had a very unusual four-lobed form, originally with a specific function. The four protruding parts, in pairs on either side of the sheath, were intended to fasten the weapon both to the belt, using the upper protrusions, and to the thigh, by means of a strap passing through the lower lobes, preventing it from swinging about. We have now developed (Bernard 1987, pp. 764-765; Lebedinsky 1997 and 2001, p. 135 and 2002, pp. 101-103; Schiltz 2002, pp. 853-872) a far better understanding of the origin and development of this type of

sheath: its simple prototype, in wood and leather, appeared as early as the third century BC in the very centre of Asia, and more specifically in the south of Siberia, in the Altai and Sayan Mountains and in Tuva, as well as in Mongolia. This type spread from east to west across Central Asia, across the whole Parthian area and also among the Sarmatians in the west. We now also know the manner in which these objects changed, as in this case and in Dachi near the Sea of Azov in southern Russia, from a practical to a ceremonial weapon, an external sign that, because of his origins, a person belonged to the nomad aristocracy. It is notable that a representation of a sheath of this type is shown on a belt buckle (Ghirshman 1979, pl. III, 2) that was in the same Parthian find in Sistan (Sakastan) in the border area between Iran, Pakistan and Afghanistan which offered also a parallel with the clasps from grave VI (cat. no. 136).

One of the clearest comparisons, both in geography and date, is provided by a coin struck on the orders of a nomad prince called Hyrko-des, to the west of the oasis of Bukhara in modern Uzbekistan, during the first century BC (Mitchiner 1976, types 669-672). No less remarkable is the total absence of this type of sheath in the art of the Kushan Empire. The decoration on the front is framed by a continuous line of rounded inlays and a simple foliage trail, and consists entirely of animal motifs. It is a sort of frieze of mythical animals. The first animal, at the base of the sheath, is a winged feline creature with claws drawn together, biting the foot of a winged and bearded dragon with a horned head and the body of a crested snake. Into its gaping mouth disappears the foot of a winged creature with horns, which in its turn bites another similar beast, which tears with its curved beak at the rear end of a winged animal which turns its feline head



to gaze at its assailant. The frieze continues up the handle, where it terminates in a final struggle. Bent and twisting bodies, swooping wings, snaking tails, curved beaks or gaping maws filled with sharp teeth, pointed ears, spiral horns, powerful claws: all creating an impression of aggression and irresistible force.

This continuous devouring of one creature by another must be seen as a representation by the Iranians of the steppes of the cycle of life and death that leads to fertility. These monsters, making of themselves a 'living grave' (Lucretius) as the prey they devour continues to live, fulfil exactly the same role as did the earth for the sedentary farmers, swallowing the seed into its entrails only to allow it to germinate with greater force.

114 Dagger with gold covered shaft decorated with a depiction of struggling animals

Afghanistan, Tillya-tepe, grave IV

Second quarter of the 1st century AD

Iron, gold, turquoise

H 37.5 cm

National Museum of Afghanistan

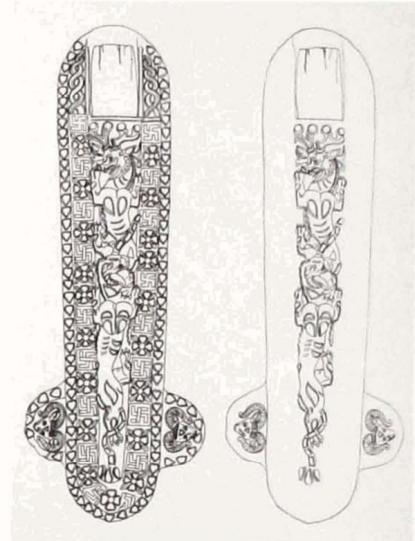
MK 04.40.387

The weapon is a short sword of the type known as an *akinakes*, characteristic of the nomads. This already appears on the reliefs decorating the staircase of the Apadana, the largest reception hall at Persepolis, showing a delegation of Sakas bringing this weapon and a rider's costume to the Great King. The iron blade is double-edged and the pommel is rounded. The long shaft with a rectangular section and the guard are covered in gold. The guard is smooth. The depiction of animals on the front must be read contiguously with the decoration on the sheath described above (cat. no. 113). A simple foliated scroll is seen on the sides of the shaft, while the plant motifs on the rear consist of rings and veined acanthus leaves forming as it were a tree which continues to branch over the rounded surface of the pommel. The motif of acanthus leaves with incised veins, which occurs on the capitals at Ai Khanum (third to second century BC), is derived from the Greek decorative tradition, in particular Megarian bowls and Hellenistic silverwork (Bernard 1968, pp. 123-124). Once again, and repeated six times, an omnipresent pattern in women's graves, the heart form, appears,

in turquoise inlays, on this major attribute of the sole dead man. Is it a purely decorative motive or a sign that carries meaning? However, the four recesses scattered along the length of the shaft are attached to the 'tree' by an explicitly represented stem, confirming that we have before us the image of a leaf. The clumsy silhouette of a standing bear,

seeming to dance, appears on the pommel. His triangular head with its round ears is shown frontally, his trunk from the side. In his mouth he holds a vine branch, the grapes in turquoise inlay. This fearsome carnivore is intentionally placed on the same side as triumphant life and is presented as a jolly vegetarian who eats grapes. On the rear of the handle of this deadly





weapon we see the branches of the Tree of Life. It seems certain that this is no coincidence: in its form and decoration this object carries us back to the reality of the most intrinsically nomadic mode of life and belief system.

115 Sheath for three knives

Afghanistan, Tillya-tepe, grave IV
Second quarter of the 1st century AD
Bronze, gold, turquoise
(within the sheath is the iron blade of a dagger with a worked ivory handle)
H 26.0 cm
National Museum of Afghanistan
MK 04.40.388

The body of the sheath consists of a bronze plate with rounded ends, covered in gold and with two side lobes. The bulbous central section contains the blade of an iron dagger with

an ivory handle. On the rear of the sheath was a second tube of leather into which two smaller daggers were fitted, head to toe, reflecting a practice observed in Tuva in Siberia and also in Mongolia. Two fighting mythical creatures, one devouring the other, are shown on the covering. The attacker is a winged dragon with a waving crest, with the upper body and head seen from above, while the rear body and the feet are seen from the side. The creature being attacked has a battered head, shown side-on, with a powerful mouth full of teeth and deer's antlers with several branches, the ends decorated with turquoise. This is perhaps a reference to one of the symbolic figures of the nomads, the deer, which frequently haunts the art of the steppes, from Siberia to the Danube and beyond. Two ram's heads are shown on the side lobes (see also cat. no. 108), depicted frontally, with horns shown as grooved volutes and a hol-

low triangle on the forehead. A row of hearts with turquoise inlay work runs around the entire border. Parallel to this is a frieze of alternating squares – some of a four-leaf clover with four heart-shaped leaves in turquoise – and an Indian motif, the swastika, of coloured glass paste which must originally have been bright blue.

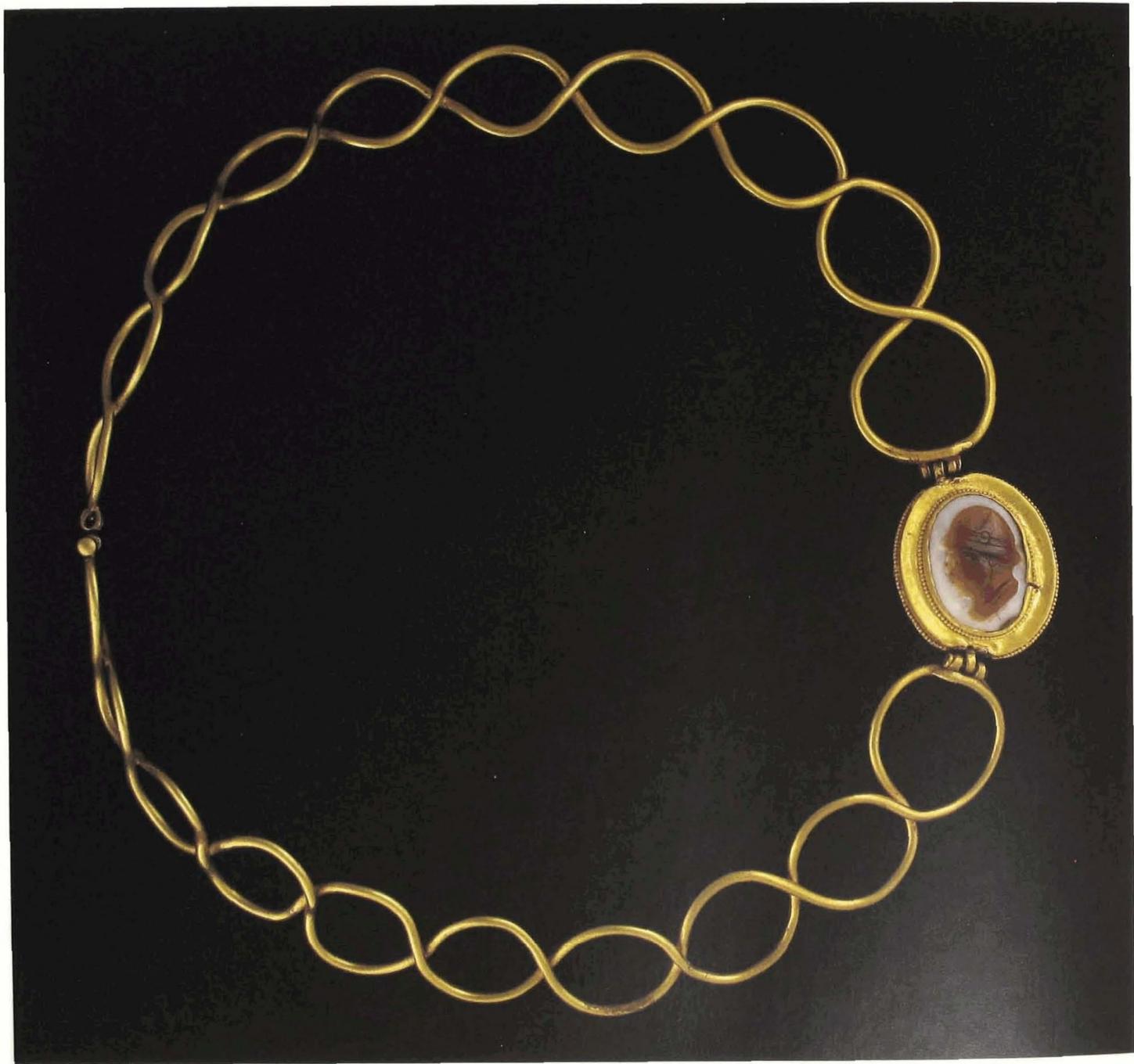
A two-part sheath, as used by nomads, the antlers of a deer, a Chinese dragon, Indian swastikas, shoulders emphasised with inlay work using comma shapes as employed by the Achaemenids, Greek modelling and overabundant decoration with heart shapes: this object provides one of the clearest examples of the diversity of the elements used in the art from Tillya-tepe.

116 Necklace with cameo

Afghanistan, Tillya-tepe, grave IV
Second quarter of the 1st century AD
Gold, sardonyx
L 21.0 cm
National Museum of Afghanistan
MK 04.40.378

The necklace consists of two symmetrical elements. Two thick, round gold cables, in figure-of-eight twist and soldered at the intersections, terminating above with a closure fastened with a gold nail. The size of the figure-of-eight loops

steadily increases towards the bottom, so that the central ornament is shown to its best advantage. The ornament is a cameo attached by hinges to the gold cables. The two-layered stone has a white background with a head depicted in profile in brown. The figure wears a helmet characteristic of depictions of the royal Graeco-Bactrian iconography. The form of the necklace, which does not occur in the art of the Kushans, is known from representations of Indo-Parthian rulers from Arachosia and the Punjab from the first half of the first century AD. This is



first noted in the case of Gondophares (circa 20-46 AD), the founder of the dynasty, and his example was generally followed by his successors (Bernard 1987, pp. 763-764). Whether the stone was engraved in the Greek era as the archaeologist conducting the excavations believed, or if it was an imitation made to order as suspected by Paul Bernard on the grounds of the moderate quality of the finish, it is, like the necklace itself, clearly an emblem of power.

117 Bracteates decorated with four roundels

Afghanistan, Tillya-tepe, grave IV
Second quarter of the 1st century AD
Gold

1.9 x 1.3 x 0.2 cm
National Museum of Afghanistan
MK 04.40.404



118 Two shoe decorations (hearts and leaves)

Afghanistan, Tillya-tepe, grave IV
Second quarter of the 1st century AD
Gold, turquoise

2.5 x 2.7 cm
National Museum of Afghanistan
MK 04.40.402





119 Indian medallion

Afghanistan, Tillya-tepe, grave IV
Last quarter of the 1st century BC
Gold
Ø 1.6 cm
National Museum of Afghanistan
MK 04.40.392

Obverse: a standing man in half profile, seen from the right; a garment slung over the left shoulder hangs down to the knees but leaves the legs, the right shoulder and a large part of the body exposed. The man seems to be walking while pushing an eight-spoked wheel in front of him with both hands. In front of him, top right of the field, is an inscription in Kharoshthi, the script of the Gandhara kingdom, 'dharmacakrapravata [ko]', meaning: 'he who brings the wheel of the law into motion'. Reverse: a standing lion, seen from the side, turning to the left and with the right forepaw raised. In front of him, to the left of the field, is the Buddhist symbol called the nandipada (a circle with a trident above); behind him, at top right of the field, is an inscription in Kharoshthi: 'Sih [o] vigatabhay [o]', meaning 'the lion has driven away fear'. It is possible that we have here the oldest representation of the Buddha, a forerunner of traditional Buddhist iconography. The notion of the putting into motion of the wheel of the law (dharmacakra) comes from the Buddha's first sermon, delivered at Benares (Varanasi): the eight spokes symbolise the eightfold path, the route to enlightenment.

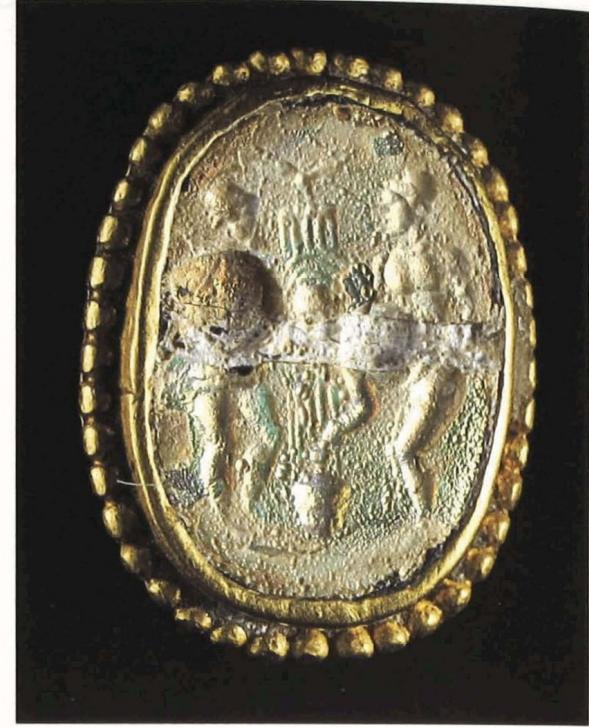


The lion is the symbol of the spiritual power of Buddhas and Bodhisattvas, who fear no evil; the lion's roar makes everyone aware of the call of the dharma, the truth at the core of existence.

120 Appliqué

Afghanistan, Tillya-tepe, grave IV
Second quarter of the 1st century AD
Gold, glass paste
1.8 x 1.3 x 0.6 cm
National Museum of Afghanistan
MK 04.40.18

This oval appliqué has a tube at the rear allowing it to be attached to a garment. On the front a granulated border surrounds an intaglio showing three helmeted warriors, two of whom carry shields. They are standing around a pillar surmounted by an eagle; one bends towards an amphora resting on the ground. Comparison with other engraved stones suggests that this image may be interpreted as showing the Heraclides, the sons of Heracles, drawing lots to determine their future kingdoms next to an altar dedicated to Zeus. The (admittedly rather uncertain) hypothesis might be formulated that such a scene, showing warriors casting



121 Head-dress ornament. Tree

Afghanistan, Tillya-tepe, grave IV
Second quarter of the 1st century AD
Gold, pearls
H 9.0 cm
National Museum of Afghanistan
MK 04.40.400

The 'tree' consists of a vertical stem of quadrangular section to which round threads with pearls and flat discs have been attached. The crown of the 'tree' consists of a horizontal leaf cut into six smaller leaves, each bearing six discs.

The Siberian collection of Peter the Great in the Hermitage in St Petersburg includes three examples of similar golden trees (Artamonov 1973, p. 209), consisting of a stem, branches and pendants, one of which (fig. 275) has leaf pendants with the exact shape of a heart. This is notable, and probably carries some significance, but the meaning of these hearts is not yet known.

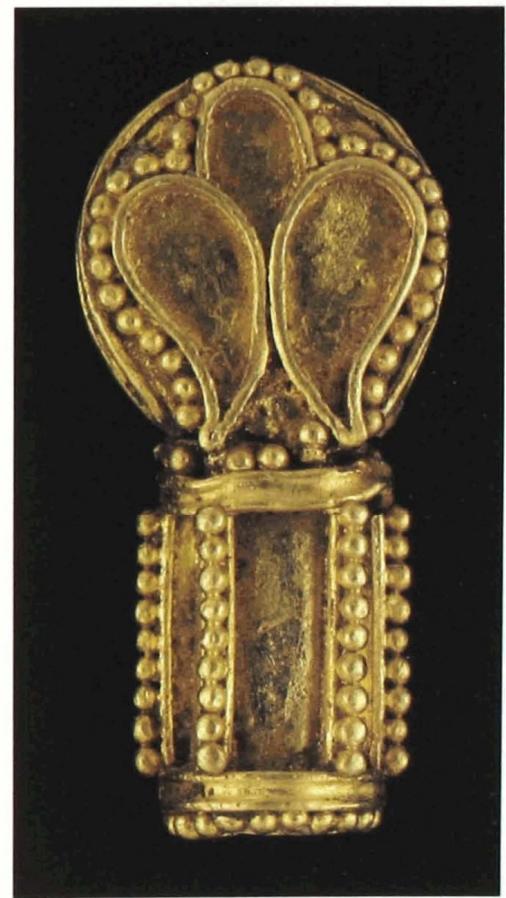


Together with the ram (cat. no. 108), this Tree of Life forms part of the man's head covering, following a tradition into which the woman's crown (cat. no. 134) from grave VI also fits.

122 Ornament with oval head

Afghanistan, Tillya-tepe, grave IV
Second quarter of the 1st century AD
Gold
H 2.6 cm
National Museum of Afghanistan
MK 04.40.377

This ornament has an oval head and a hollow, half-oval central section with recesses intended for inlay work. It is probable that this piece formed the end of a belt, and probably a sword-belt. A similar ornament was found near a sword with a four-lobed sheath at the archaeological site at Dachi close to the Azov Sea in southern Russia (Schiltz 2001, no. 237).







123 Phiale (bowl)

Afghanistan, Tillya-tepe, grave IV
Second quarter of the 1st century AD
Gold
Ø 23.0 cm; H 4.0 cm
National Museum of Afghanistan
MK 04.40.381

The convex *omphalos* ('navel', or more generally 'centre') of this drinking bowl is accentuated by a number of roundels and forms the centre of 32 radiating ribs. On the outside of the rim, five punched Greek letters – CTA MA – indicate the weight of metal in staters (tetradrachms), employing the Ionic system which used the letters of the Greek alphabet in a decimal system. M indicates 40 and A is 1, giving 41 (staters).

Taking account of the weight of the bowl, which can hardly have changed, a stater (tetradrachm) therefore has a value of 15.56 grams (Bernard 2000, p. 1426).

It is tempting to link the location of this bowl, under the head of the deceased, with Herodotus's observation about the *phiale* (IV, 10): he regarded such bowls as symbolising royal authority among the Scythians. However it would probably be wiser to regard the bowl simply as a head-rest, a more luxurious version of the wooden cushions, curved to hold the deceased person's head dress, which are found in graves in the Altai Mountains of Siberia. This would seem to be confirmed by the fact that the heads of two of the women (from graves III and VI) lay on metal vessels.

124 v Appliqué showing a dragon

Afghanistan, Tillya-tepe, grave IV
Second quarter of the 1st century AD
Gold
3.5 x 0.8 cm
National Museum of Afghanistan
MK 04.40.403

This is a purely linear depiction of a mythical animal, lacking perspective and employing incised lines. Its long, undulating body has more of the Chinese dragon about it than the Greek sea monster the *ketus* (see Boardman 2003).





125 Shield-shaped appliqué

Afghanistan. Tillya-tepe, grave IV
Second quarter of the 1st century AD
Gold

4.7 x 3.6 x 0.5 cm
National Museum of Afghanistan
MK 04.40.386

The shield-like shape of this appliqué, with five hooks on the rear and two fixing holes below, occurs frequently in ornaments of carved wood or leather found in the Altai Mountains of Siberia, but also on ivory sword sheaths from the Graeco-Bactrian era, as found in the Temple of the Oxus at Takht-i Sangin

in Tajikistan (Litvinsky 2001, pl. 72). It shows a winged panther standing on the back of a fallen antelope: his claws are pressed into the flesh of his prey and he is biting its rump with widely opened jaws.

This is a leitmotif of nomad art from the Yellow River to the Danube. The manner in which the predator is represented, as though from above, with the body from the side and the head front on or more precisely from above, the attitude of the victim, with the head turned back and the legs folded beneath the body, and the use of comma-shaped recesses to accentuate the shoulder and the thigh, all sit within the purest tradition of the art of the steppes.



126 Shield-shaped appliqué

Afghanistan, Tillya-tepe, grave IV
Second quarter of the 1st century AD
Gold, turquoise
5.1 x 4.3 x 0.7 cm
National Museum of Afghanistan
MK 04.40.385

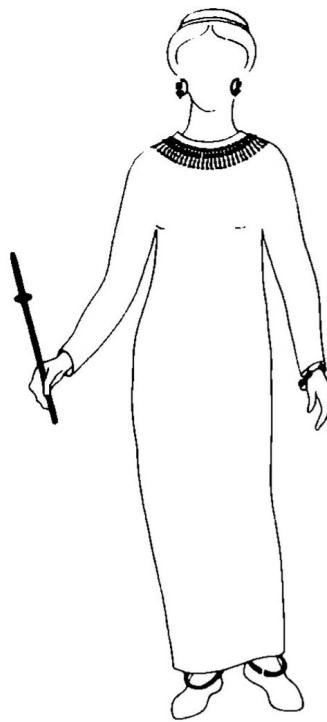
This appliqué, of the same type as the previous example, still retains its turquoise inlay work. It shows a tableau of two winged wild beasts with three sharp claws to each foot. Their bodies are shown vertically; one bites the rump of a horse which has fallen and is shown horizontally; the other bites its neck. The theme and

the manner the picture is inscribed in the field are characteristic of steppe art. Nevertheless with its modelling, the delineation of the fur and the manes, and the realistic details, this image shows more clearly than the last example that the goldsmith who made it was more or less familiar with another tradition, which in the west led to the creation of Graeco-Scythian art.

As with so many other objects from the necropolis, the presence of heart-shaped inlay work on the upper and lower surfaces of the plate cannot be mere coincidence. In this particular case the motif does appear to have an explicit significance: it looks like a signature.



Grave V



This grave, measuring 2.05 to 2.10 x 0.80 metres, was inserted in the Achaemenid period mud-brick rampart on the north side of the mound. Since no metal clamps or nails were found it seems that, in contrast to the other coffins made from wooden boards, the person buried here,

at a depth of 1.65 metres, was probably interred in a coffin hewn out of a solid tree trunk, as was the practice in the Altai Mountains of Siberia. Taking account of the manner in which the numerous small silver appliqués, round or in the shape of a vine leaf, lay below as well as on top of the coffin, it seems that this 2 x 0.65 metre lidless cist was entirely wound round by a cloth (possibly in several layers) onto which the decorations had been sewn.

The deceased was a girl or young woman aged up to around 20. She lay on her back, with her head to the west. When we consider the robe, probably decorated with some tiny beads but without appliqués or bracteates, the relative simplicity of her adornments and the moderate quality of the grave furnishings, this is the least wealthy grave in the necropolis. As well as the golden band used to bind her jaw, the deceased also wore heart-shaped earrings (cat. no. 128). She wore a polychrome necklace (cat. no. 129) at her neck, more precisely along the neckline of her robe, a bracelet with sliding ends at her left wrist (cat. no. 127) and rings at her ankles (cat. no. 130). A pendant in the form of a lion (cat. no. 131) and two gems (cat. nos. 132 and 133) lay in a heap to the top right in a corner of the coffin, together with other amulets, including a small bell. Close to her right hand lay a silver mirror with a stand, together with the remains of a small case in gold brocade, sewn with tiny beads. Within the reach of the same hand was a woven basket containing a lidded silver cosmetics box and an iron hook. Her feet seemed to be resting on a silver dish of low silver content. However there was also an object which appears to contradict this general air of simplicity: just as with the deceased in grave VI, a long hollow cylinder reminiscent of a sceptre – in this case in silver with remnants of wood inside – lay beside the woman, close to her right shoulder.

127 ⁷ Bracelet with sliding ends

Afghanistan, Tillya-tepe, grave V
Second quarter of the 1st century AD
Gold, turquoise, amber, lead glass,
deteriorated stones
Ø 6.7 cm
National Museum of Afghanistan
MK 04.40.134

The bracelet is made from a bent thin gold thread, with the spiralled ends twisting together as a fastening, which allows the ornament to be adjustable. This type of bracelet has also been found in the north of Bactria, particularly in Dalverzin-tepe in Uzbekistan (Pougatchenkova 1978, fig. 74), and at Taxila in Pakistan (Marshall 1951, pl. 195b). In this case however

the bracelet is also decorated with various coloured stones in a ribbed gold setting. The first stone is brown and in a rather poor condition (it may be ceramic rather than a gemstone). It has a rectangular setting. Next is a similarly damaged white stone in a square setting, then a miniature gold axe head, perpendicular to the bracelet, and next an originally blue-green but badly altered lead glass cabochon in an oval setting. A turquoise then follows, engraved with a figure carrying a shield and lance, possibly the goddess Athena. The two adjacent rings suggest that there must have been another stone, lost at a much earlier stage. The final setting is once again oval and includes an amber

cabochon. There are two loops to the rear, showing that the stone has been reused. The whole assembly appears to be a collection of reused elements mounted on a bracelet. These disparate elements were valuable, and it is probable that a variety of magical properties were ascribed to them.



128 A pair of heart-shaped earrings

Afghanistan, Tillya-tepe, grave V
Second quarter of the 1st century AD
Gold, turquoise
Ø 7.2 cm
National Museum of Afghanistan
MK 04.40.137

The two elements are identical. An oval rod, bent into a ring, ends in a square box originally inlaid with a turquoise in both cases. Below this is a heart-shaped setting which also held a turquoise.





129 Ornament for the neck of a robe

Afghanistan, Tillya-tepe, grave V
Second quarter of the 1st century AD
Gold, turquoise, garnet, pyrites
L. 29.1 cm
National Museum of Afghanistan
MK 04.40.140

This ornament is noteworthy both for the repetition and alternation of forms and also the sophisticated effect of the striking polychromy. It is a combination of two types of pendants. One type consists of smooth, hollow beads under which a round setting of semi-precious stones (garnet or turquoise) has been soldered;

an almond-shaped setting with a dark semi-precious stone hangs from this, with a round disc of smooth gold suspended from that in its turn. The other type of pendant consists of granulated rings with a spacer in the form of a double crescent attached; below this hangs a similar almond-shaped setting with a dark stone, and below this the same smooth golden roundel. Similar compositions occur at Taxila in Pakistan, while at Tillya-tepe itself two other ornaments were found (cat. nos. 72 and 73) displaying a series of rounded forms enclosed by crescents. The motif of precious stones in an almond-shaped setting with a

granulated border is fairly widely used: it is notable that a very similar design was found in a grave at the mouth of the Don, and was part of an adornment similarly sewn to the neck of a robe (Schiltz 2001 nos. 275 and 278). The two conical elements with their milled edges function as fastenings. However the small tubes soldered to the rear of the crescents, which a thread could pass through, indicate that this ornament, like so many others of its type, was intended as an ornament to be sewn to the neck of the wearer's gown.



130 1 A pair of anklets

Afghanistan, Tillya-tepe, grave V
Second quarter of the 1st century AD
Gold
L 27.0 cm
National Museum of Afghanistan
MK 04.40.85

131 1 Pendant in the form of a lion

Afghanistan, Tillya-tepe, grave V
Second quarter of the 1st century AD
Amber
2.6 x 2.2 x 1.0 cm
National Museum of Afghanistan
MK 04.40.141



132 7 Intaglio with depiction of a griffin

Afghanistan, Tillya-tepe, grave V
4th century BC (?)
Chalcedony
3.1 x 2.8 cm
National Museum of Afghanistan
MK 04.40.161



of the similarities there is an inclination to date this gem much earlier than the date of its burial. Possibly this is a piece produced by an experienced artist in the blossoming period of the Graeco-Bactrian Empire, or it may be a Graeco-Persian intaglio reused as an element of a necklace and then finally as a separate jewel, the image on which, though damaged, retained great significance for the nomads.

Although it takes many different forms, the griffin was in great favour in the collective imagination of the nomads.

Images of it are found in large numbers in the Altai Mountains of Siberia (Rudenko 1953, fig. 163; pl. CIX, 2; CX, 1; CXI etc). Herodotus (IV, 27) mentioned a legend in which griffins took the role of guardians of the gold in the Ryphaean Mountains (Altai Mountains).

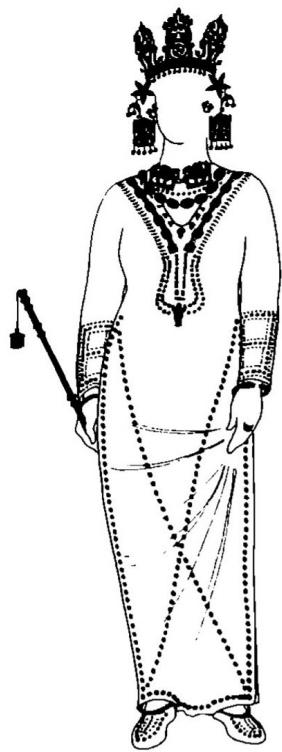
The milky-blue stone, domed at the rear is longitudinally pierced. The griffin, leaping to the right, in many respects resembles the common representations of this monster seen in Graeco-Scythian art from the north coast of the Black Sea as well as in Macedonian art from Vergina and from Tarentum (Taranto): it has a muscular body, an erect, curling tail, large wings with short feathers and long flight feathers, a long, undulating neck with an erect crest, pointed ears and a large and gaping mouth. Because

133 Intaglio with a representation of Nike

Afghanistan, Tillya-tepe, grave V
Second quarter of the 1st century AD
Silver, malachite
Ø 1.0 cm
National Museum of Afghanistan
MK 04.40.143

This gem is placed in a round silver setting with an attachment point to the rear. It is a green stone with a representation of a winged Nike, holding in her left hand a crown with long ribbons, while the right hand holds a palm branch which rests on her shoulder. A similar representation is found on a brass ring in the nomad necropolis at Tulkhar in the north of Bactria (now in Tajikistan; Mandelstam 1966, p. 121).

Grave VI



The sixth grave was located in the western section of a corridor which encircled the former temple. It was well preserved, and at the top took the form of a 3.0 x 2.5 metre rectangle, narrowing to 2.5 metres x 1.2 metres at a depth of 1 metre and then continuing down for a further metre. The shelf so created had an earth-covered mat, similar to that in grave IV. Free space remained between the ceiling and the cist. The coffin was made of boards and was 2 metres long, 50 centimetres wide and around 40 centimetres high. It rested on brick supports, placing it at around 20 centimetres above the base. The coffin was probably unlidded and

like the other was probably wound in a cloth decorated with gold and silver roundels.

The occupant, a young female of around 20 and of average height (1.52 metres), lay on her back with her head to the west. An unusual detail was that, like the woman in the grave at Koktepe near Samarkand, Uzbekistan, her skull was intentionally deformed, in accordance with a practice then current among the upper levels of society in Central Asia. Her head, bearing a tall golden crown (cat. no. 134) rested on a small silver plate. Pins with pendants had been attached to her hair (cat. no. 142), while on either side of her face was a large gold pendant with a depiction of a goddess with two animals (cat. no. 137). The woman wore earrings showing winged cupids (cat. no. 138). Her jaw was held closed with a golden band. In her mouth lay a silver Parthian coin bearing a countermark, probably coming from Margiana, a region in the present border area of Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan and Afghanistan. Around her neck was a chain of gold beads inlaid with turquoise (cat. no. 143), and around each arm was a bracelet with a lion head (cat. no. 140). In her right hand she held a sort of gold sceptre, in her left hand, which bore a gem ring (cat. no. 139), a Parthian coin (cat. no. 146). She wore a gold anklet, inlaid with turquoise, on each ankle (cat. no. 141). Her clothing consisted of either a long robe or more probably a tunic and trousers, and was decorated at the breast, shoulders (cat. no. 145) and sleeves with rows of numerous appliqués and bracteates bearing various motifs. The central ornament in the middle of the chest was the 'Aphrodite of Bactria' (cat. no. 135), covered by a smooth moulded appliquéd and with three attachment rings, two in the region of the wings and one by the feet. Clasps, showing an embracing man and woman (cat. no. 136), closed the neck of the garment. The bracteates found in the area of the feet indicate that the deceased was dressed in leather or felt slippers.

A silver Chinese mirror lay on her breast. A second mirror, with an ivory handle, lay at her feet, next to a large silver vessel.

Outside the coffin lay a woven basket containing a clay vessel, the remnants of iron toilet articles, three glass bottles, two ivory boxes, two miniature silver pots and a cosmetics plate with a file and pins.



134 Crown

Afghanistan, Tillya-tepe, grave VI
Second quarter of the 1st century AD
Gold, imitation turquoise

45.0 x 13.0 cm

National Museum of Afghanistan
MK 04.40.50

The crown consisted of a band in the form of diadem, with five elements attached which together formed 'trees'. The band was cut out of gold leaf and decorated with twenty six-leaved rosettes from which hung gold roundels.

Each rosette had a round recess with a granulated finish, containing a turquoise. To the rear of the band were five vertical tubes made of rolled gold leaf, securing the five 'trees' to two identical tubes attached to each of the five 'tree branches', and also joining the trees together. This ingenious system allowed this superb nomadic head-dress to be dismantled and transported.

Four of the 'trees' were identical and spread their branches symmetrically on either side of the trunk, which was decorated with an excised

motif of two opposed hearts with a crescent between them. On the upper branches were two birds, their wings extended, reaching up with their heads to the top of the tree, appearing to touch it with their bills. Each tree was decorated with six rosettes with six leaves, bearing round pendants. The fifth (middle) tree lacks the birds but is decorated with rosettes and pendants; on either side of the broad trunk ascend two branches which meet above, forming a round opening in which a rotating ornament is placed.



This type of crown has a lot of parallels among the nomads but is not found among the Greeks, the Parthians or the Kushans. As early as the end of the fourth century BC, the high head-gear worn by the young warrior from the kurgan mound at Issyk in Kazakhstan, was decorated with birds in the crown, which undoubtedly represented the Trees of Life. The same combination of tree and birds is found at the start of the modern era at the Sarmatian site at Khokhlač near Novocherkassk, and also on the diadem of the princess from Kobyakovo, a little to the west near the mouth of the Don. Similar head-dresses, consisting of a diadem decorated with tree and bird motifs, were also found from fifth and sixth century sites on the eastern edge of the continent of Asia, in the burial mounds at royal Silla in the southeast of Korea.

135 Appliqué 'the Aphrodite of Bactria'

Afghanistan, Tillya-tepe, grave VI
Second quarter of the 1st century AD
Gold, turquoise
5.0 x 2.6 cm
National Museum of Afghanistan
MK 04.40.9

This appliqué shows a winged female figure. She holds her head a little to the left and stands with hips swayed, one hand flat on the right hip. Her left elbow rests on a pillar with two recesses, one of which still contains a turquoise. With stretched fingers she loosely holds the garment falling over her right hip, which leaves her lower belly largely bare. Her left knee is bent, so that the leg is revealed beneath the folds, in an effect of wet drapery.

This seductive figure, clearly inspired by Hellenistic models, might indeed pass for Aphrodite. While her posture suggests that,

nevertheless in reality she conforms to a quite different and non-Greek ideal of beauty, as witness the rounded face, lengthened eyes, the rather squat posture and the folds which give the neck and body a certain plumpness. Furthermore the goddess has short sickle-shaped wings, she wears various bracelets on her wrist and upper arms, her hair is parted in the middle and she wears a woven hair-band decorated with sequins. Accentuated hollows (dimples?) emphasise the corners of the mouth. On her forehead between the eyebrows is a dot in the Indian way. Should she therefore be given an Indian name rather than 'Aphrodite', or perhaps she is Parthian or Iranian? Surely not; and yet it is certain that she had a real significance, and that the nomad's daughter or granddaughter whose breast she adorned believed strongly in her powers.





36 A pair of clasps showing Dionysus and Ariadne

Afghanistan, Tillya-tepe, grave VI
Second quarter of the 1st century AD
Gold, turquoise
6.5 x 7.0 cm
National Museum of Afghanistan
MK 04.40.53

The clasps are both provided at the backside with a smooth appliqué, but one bears a loop while the other is fitted with a hook. On the front they each have almost identical tableaux, one a mirror image of the other. A man and woman are shown in an embrace, seated on a monster who is striding forward, one forepaw raised. The man sits astride, the woman is side-saddle. He wears a short robe which exposes

his knees, she has a long robe reaching to her feet. The man is turning tenderly towards his companion, placing an arm around her shoulders. However it is to a hairy figure with pointed ears and a flat nose, half slumped on the ground, that he passes a ribbed, two-handled chalice. In one hand this figure holds a shepherd's staff which has fallen to the ground, with the other hand he lifts a *rhyton* (drinking



horn) towards the chalice, as though asking for more; at the same time the precious liquid runs into his mouth from the bottom end of his cup, which is shaped like a horned head, like rhytons found in the old Parthian capital of Nisa. For a Greek there would be no doubt: this balding figure with his bushy face, here dressed in an animal skin secured with a Hercules knot, is Silenus, a god who makes prophecies during

his frequent bouts of drunkenness, and who was regarded in Nisa as the foster-father of Dionysus. Here, Dionysus himself makes him drink. The god is clad in the *nebris*, his characteristic fawn-skin. The spots of the animal's skin can be seen below his arm, and even its foot is shown. His features are Asian, in his long curling hair is a wreath, probably of ivy, and he is shod in short boots decorated with

palmettes, with a heart-shaped recess in the toe. His companion, with less slanted eyes, is none other than Ariadne. She also wears a wreath. Around her neck is not so much a neck lace as a decoration of the neck opening of her robe, as worn by the women in the graves at Tillya-tepe (cat. no. 129), which extends to a round ornament on her shoulder. Behind her hovers Nike, in both cases holding in her left



hand a palm branch which rests on her shoulder, while with the right hand she holds a wreath above the heads of the couple. The goddess wears a tunic belted in tightly at the waist, with a long robe beneath. She is barefoot and has bracelets on her wrists and upper arms. This tableau, decidedly Greek in inspiration, bears witness to the success of Dionysiac motives from Bactria to India.

On the other hand Parthian period bronze belt buckles found in Sakastan (now the border area between Iran, Pakistan and Afghanistan) show a man and woman, sitting facing or beside one another and embracing (Ghirshman 1979, pl. I and pl. III, 1). This kind of explicit unity between man and woman is unknown in the iconography of both the Greeks and the settled

Iranians, but seems to fit more naturally into the world of the nomads, where women played an important and recognised role. Perhaps we can take this unity of man and woman on their animal mount to symbolise the woman's status as consort to the leader, and her apotheosis in death.

Leaving aside the meaning of the clasps and their gold and turquoise ornamentation, there is a further element connecting them to the world of the steppes, namely the unusual mount ridden by Dionysus and Ariadne, which is also given a saddle-cloth decorated with turquoise, with two round turquoise pom-poms at the corners. Neither a bull, nor an ass, nor even an Indian panther, the monster, its ears pointing ahead, a pointed tongue protruding from two

rows of sharp teeth. It has the folded muzzle of a lion, the beard of a goat, the crest of a dragon, a long tail with a plume and the clawed feet of a predator. It provides a nice example of the hybrid monsters which were a favourite motif in the art of the steppes.

<137 A pair of pendants showing the 'Mistress of the Animals'

Afghanistan, Tillya-tepe, grave VI
Second quarter of the 1st century AD
Gold, turquoise
5.8 x 4.6 x 0.5 cm
National Museum of Afghanistan
MK 04.40.52

These two pendants show identical images in a rectangular frame, with a rosette of four heart-shaped leaves top centre and a bird, shown in profile, at each corner. With their claws, their imposing heads and their large eyes they remind us of owls. At the lower corners are two fish heads, greatly reminiscent of the 'dolphins' described earlier (cat. nos. 59 and 80). The world above is therefore populated by birds, the world below by fish. The ordering of the world is illustrated by animals. It is therefore no great surprise that the panel within the frame shows a 'Mistress of the Animals'. She is shown frontally, just like her male peer the 'Dragon Master' (cat. no. 61), and exhibits a femininity confirmed by her breasts, decorated with an X-shaped ornament, as well as the diadem from which her curling locks emerge, and her bracelets. The large, heart-shaped turquoise behind her shoulders may represent wings. Her robe, which is really more like a veil, spreads out at the bottom into a tripartite ornament with a slash in the middle, reminiscent of the Dragon Master's acanthus leaf 'skirt'.

The creatures to left and right of the woman are shown tail up with their heads bowed.

They have something of the dog or wolf about them, with their pointed ears and gaping jaws, with which they seem to bite at the 'dolphins'. However they have a single fin rather than four feet, and their tail is clearly formed from a plume of (acanthus?) leaves which seem to be bound like a bunch. The central area of their bodies is decorated with a line of turquoise inlay but there is no sign of scales or hair: it looks as though they are wearing belts. With a gesture that appears more a fond caress than a restraint, the goddess has placed her hand on the belly of one of these strange beasts. With the other hand she holds a round fruit, an apple or pomegranate, seeming to offer it to us.

Nana? Anahita? Ardokhsho? With this figure too it is for the present impossible to identify a deity described or depicted in any pantheon which this might represent. However in view



of the gesture of offering made by the goddess, together with her accentuated nakedness and her surroundings, including both plants and various kinds of animal, she is clearly associated with productivity, fertility and rebirth, themes which underlie the conception that all Iranian peoples and especially the nomads have of the world.

138 A pair of earrings decorated with cupids

Afghanistan, Tillya-tepe, grave VI
Second quarter of the 1st century AD
Gold
7.0 x 1.5 cm
National Museum of Afghanistan
MK 04.40.7

These identical earrings consist of a bent gold rod, terminating at one end in a small horn and at the other end in a winged cupid figure, backwards arched *putto* (cherub) with a crescent above the forehead.

This type of earring, depicting a bent body, is familiar from Greek goldsmiths' work, particularly that from Tarentum (Taranto). Each earring is surrounded by a ring consisting of two circles of beads.

These adornments show clear signs of wear.

< 139 Ring with gem

Afghanistan, Tillya-tepe, grave VI
Second quarter of the 1st century AD
Gold, carnelian
2.0 x 1.7 cm
National Museum of Afghanistan
MK 04.40.45

The ring is cast in solid gold. The dark stone shows the left side of a male head depicted in profile; he has a straight nose and a band in his curly hair, which reaches down to his neck.



140 A pair of bracelets with horned lion heads

Afghanistan, Tillya-tepe, grave VI
Second quarter of the 1st century AD
Gold, turquoise
L 18.5 cm
National Museum of Afghanistan
MK 04.40.5

These two identical bracelets, cast in gold, have lion heads at each end; they have wide eyes, gaping jaws and clearly indicated teeth, and flattened ears and horns. Like the bracelets



from grave II (cat. no. 58), these objects show marked similarities with bracelets from the Siberian collection of Peter the Great in the Hermitage in St Petersburg (Rudenko 1962, pl. XIII and XV) and with others from Taxila in Pakistan (Marshall 1951, pl. 182, nos. 133-136).

141 > Pair of anklets

Afghanistan, Tillya-tepe, grave VI
Second quarter of the 1st century AD
Gold, turquoise
L 21.2 cm
National Museum of Afghanistan
MK 04.40.3

142 ▲ Two hair ornaments

Afghanistan, Tillya-tepe, grave VI
Second quarter of the 1st century AD
Gold, silver
Ø 7.0 and 1.8 cm; L 4.0 cm
National Museum of Afghanistan
MK 04.40.1

Each ornament, comparable to one found in grave I (cat. no. 38), consists of a gold ornament on a pointed silver rod of low silver content. The object is made from thin gold leaf cut into the form of a flower with five petals. The centre of the flower is an open disc with a granulated border, holding a tube in rolled gold leaf. The rod was to be inserted in this tube. Round pendants are attached to two of the petals. The petals at the front are held together with a thread, to which are attached a crescent and a further three roundels. Decorative beads are still attached to some of the threads.





143 Necklace

Afghanistan, Tillya-tepe, grave VI
Second quarter of the 1st century AD
Gold, turquoise
Ø of the pearls 2.8 x 2.5 cm
National Museum of Afghanistan
MK 04.40.51

The necklace consists of ten round and two elongated beads, the latter serving as a fastening. The beads are divided into segments by granulated lines. Alternate segments contain a rosette with five heart-shaped leaves inlaid with turquoise.



144 Two ornaments in the form of flowers

Afghanistan, Tillya-tepe, grave VI
Second quarter of the 1st century AD
Gold
Ø 3.0 cm; L 5.7 cm
National Museum of Afghanistan
MK 04.40.2

The flowers have five heart-shaped petals and two pendants.

145 Part of an ornament

Afghanistan, Tillya-tepe, grave VI
Second quarter of the 1st century AD
Gold, turquoise
Ø 1.7 cm; L 4.6 cm
National Museum of Afghanistan
MK 04.40.47

This ornament is a combination of roundels alternating with double crescents, similar to finds from grave I (cat. no. 36), grave II (cat. nos. 72 and 73) and grave V (cat. no. 129). The only point of difference is that the disc here is decorated with a motif of four hearts arranged in a cloverleaf pattern and inlaid with turquoise. The heart motif can also be found as the spacing pieces between the opposed crescents. The roundels, hanging symmetrically above, below and to left and right of the ornament, seem to suggest that it was made to be placed against a rounded part of the body, a shoulder perhaps.



146 Parthian coin, imitation of coin of Gotarzes I

Afghanistan, Tillya-tepe, grave VI
Middle of the 1st century BC
Gold
Ø 1.8 cm
National Museum of Afghanistan
MK 04.40.16

Obverse: the head of a bearded king, turned to the left, wearing a horned tiara, its points indicated by three rows of dots. The lower outline of the hair is also indicated with dots. At the front of the coronet is a prone deer, a motif which probably also appeared on top of the crown, but cannot be seen properly because of defective stamping of the coin. An oval countermark is visible behind the head, with a face depicted frontally.

Reverse: a figure on a throne, turned to the left, holding a bow in his outstretched right hand. There are traces of an inscription, which can be reconstructed as follows: above is BASILEÔS, to the right MEGALOU, below ARSAKOU, and left, on two lines THEOPATOROS/NIKATOROS.

The coin is a local imitation of silver Parthian coins of Gotarzes I (95-90 BC), probably issued halfway through the first century BC. It is made of gold, rather than the silver or bronze which was generally used for Parthian and Graeco-Bactrian coinage; this supports the suggestion that to mint currency was not so much of commercial importance, but rather a symbol of prestige for the lesser rulers within the sphere of influence of the Parthian Empire and of the Arsacid Dynasty.





Begram

Pierre Cambon

In the report pertaining to his first research on Begram, the English explorer, archaeologist and coin specialist Charles Masson, in quest of the legendary Alexandria of the Caucasus, writes: 'In July of the present year [1833], I left the city of Kaboul to explore the districts north of it at the base of the mountains Hindu Kush, with the primary object of identifying the site of Alexandria ad Caucasm. [...] I was recompensed by the discovery of numerous interesting objects, and among them the site of an ancient city of immense extent, on the plain now called Begram, near the confluence of the rivers of Ghorband and Panjshir, and at the head of the high road leading from Khwajah Khedri of Kohistan, to Nijraw, Taghaw, Lughman and Jalalabad. I soon learned that large numbers of coins were continually found on the plain of Begram, and my first excursion put me in possession of about eighty, procured with difficulty, as their owners were suspicious of my motives in collecting them' (in: Prinsep 1971, vol. 1, p. 81). Later, in 1836, Masson lists the ancient cities which he managed to identify in the Kohistan of Kabul, and which, according to him, suggest a coherent network: 'Begram, Parwan, Tartrung-Zar and Kallah Rajput' (*op. cit.* p. 347). 'The appellation of Begram', he adds, 'must also be considered indicative of the pre-eminence of the city it characterises, undoubtedly signifying the chief city or metropolis. About three miles east of Kaboul, we have a village and extensive pasture retaining this name, which indicates the site of the capital in which Kadphises and his lineage ruled, and whose topes we behold on the skirts of the neighbouring hills. Near Jalalabad, a spot called Begram, about a mile and a half west of the present town, denotes the site of the ancient Nysa; or if the position of that city admit of controversy, of Nagara, its successor in rank and consequence' (*op. cit.* p. 346).

'The treasure of Begram was discovered in 1937. The most spectacular pieces are made of glass and ivory. All the glassware dates back to the first century AD', Kurz writes, 'perhaps a little earlier, but definitely not later' (in: Hackin 1954, p. 145). When considering their sense of movement and eye for detail, the fishing and hunting scenes on the glass must have been made by extremely talented artists. The illustrations stand out on account of their incredible lack of restrictions and rich colouring, giving these classical motifs an almost expressionistic nature. Among the glass

ware, a unique piece was found, a depiction of the Pharos of Alexandria, one of the oldest illustrations of the famous Egyptian lighthouse from circa 285 BC. On one side, three vessels represent the seaport, on the other side one can see the statue that graced the Pharos, with at its foot two *tritons* (mermen) blowing on their conch shells. The figure with the hairless face and a club in his hand is Ptolemy I Soter (367-285 BC), who ordered the construction of the lighthouse.

Given that not many references exist, the most divergent theories can be found about the ivory. To Benjamin Rowland (1955) the disparate styles of the ivory indicate that the pieces were carved in different periods; he even believes that some pieces belong to the Gupta period. He does however not query the fact that the treasure – as generally assumed – may have been concealed in 241 AD, whilst the Gupta period begins nearly one hundred years later, in 320 AD. Neither does he question the discrepancy between the Indian objects, the making of which would stretch over a very long period, and the Chinese objects that can be dated back very accurately (to between 40 and 50 AD), or the western pieces: the glass wares would originate in the first century AD. However he does admit that the bronze pieces may date back to the first-second century AD: this statement is based on similarities with the Sirkap objects that date from the Indo-Parthian period.

In truth, the ivory from Begram is closely connected to Indian (Buddhist) Gandharan art, as appears from the so-called Butkara excavations in Swat (northern Pakistan). A couple standing beneath a *torana* (ceremonial gateway) can be seen on two reliefs from Butkara I; this scene evokes the Mithuna (love theme), often present in Gandharan art. A young flirtatious lady is depicted in three quarter profile on the most stylish panel; with a nonchalant glance she plays with her mirror, displaying a perfectly controlled sense of seduction, and she carelessly puts her hand in the cosmetics casket (?) handed over to her by her lover. The lady seems very graceful and lifelike. On the other panel, the characters are rather ungainly, even a little thickset. Thus, the love theme under a *torana* is found in places other than Begram.

Furthermore, the three-leaved bangle worn by one of the three 'goddess' statues found in the treasure of Begram also needs to be mentioned. The motif evokes the 'bird-woman' of Begram, a ceramic object with a virtually identical character: the same slightly curved nose, the same wide-open eyes with clearly visible irises, the same mouth with thin lips and

a not very amiable expression. The wreath on her head makes reference to some figurines found in Butkara.

As a final point, there are two ivory objects carved with unmistakably Buddhist motives to be precise two Jataka tales, folklore-like literature concerning the previous births of the Buddha. One tale relates the whims of the royal war-horse who takes offence because he believes he is not sufficiently respected and the king himself must come and reassure him; the other tale relates the love between princess Nalini and Ekasringa, Ekasringa being the son of a hermit and a doe.

In brief: several ivory objects found in Begram display similarities with early Indian art. As a result, the treasure of Begram reminds us of the mutual fascination between the Greek and Buddhist cultures from the first century BC and before. This is evident in the emblemata from Begram, compared correctly by Rowland 'to the steatite "paterae" found in such numbers in Taxila and elsewhere', which introduced western classical motifs into Gandharan art. This similarity is also revealed in the *Milindapanha*, a much-venerated exposition pertaining to Buddhist doctrine shaped as a dialogue between Milinda (the Indo-Greek king of Bactria Menander, 155-130 BC) and the Buddhist monk Nagasena.

'Nagasena', asked king Menander 'was the Buddha endowed with the thirty-two greater marks of a Great Man accompanied by the eighty lesser marks, and did he have a gold complexion and was he surrounded by an aura as large as one fathom?

- Yes.

- Were his parents endowed with the same characteristics?

- No.

- But a son resembles his mother or the parents of his mother, and his father or the parents of his father!

- Do you know, Great King, the lotus flower with one hundred petals?

- Yes.

- Where does it germinate?

- It germinates in mud and grows in water.'

(*Milindapanha* 1923, p. 127)

And Menander continued his questions:

'Nagasena, what is the aim of your exertion? Extinguishing past, future or actual suffering?

- Neither one nor the other.

- What is the final goal at which you aim then?

- That the current suffering may be extinguished and that no further suffering may arise.

- Does further suffering exist then?

- No.

- What exceptional sages you are to put yourselves out to extinguish something which does not exist!'

(*op. cit.* p. 135)

Chamber 10

Ivory

147 'River goddess' standing on a *makara*

Afghanistan, Begram,
project II, chamber 10
1st century AD

Ivory
45 x 26 cm

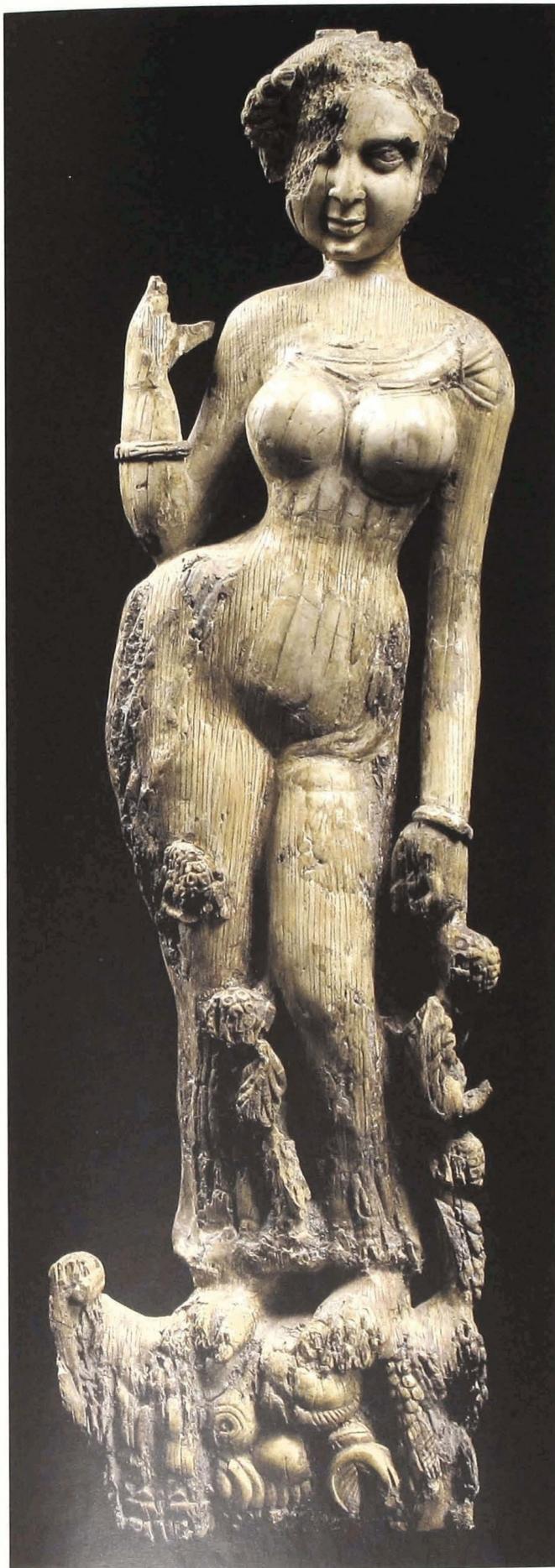
National Museum of Afghanistan
MK 04.1.14

148 'River goddess' standing on a *makara*

Afghanistan, Begram,
project II, chamber 10
1st century AD

Ivory
H 45.6 cm

National Museum of Afghanistan
MK 04.1.15





149 'River goddess' standing on a makara

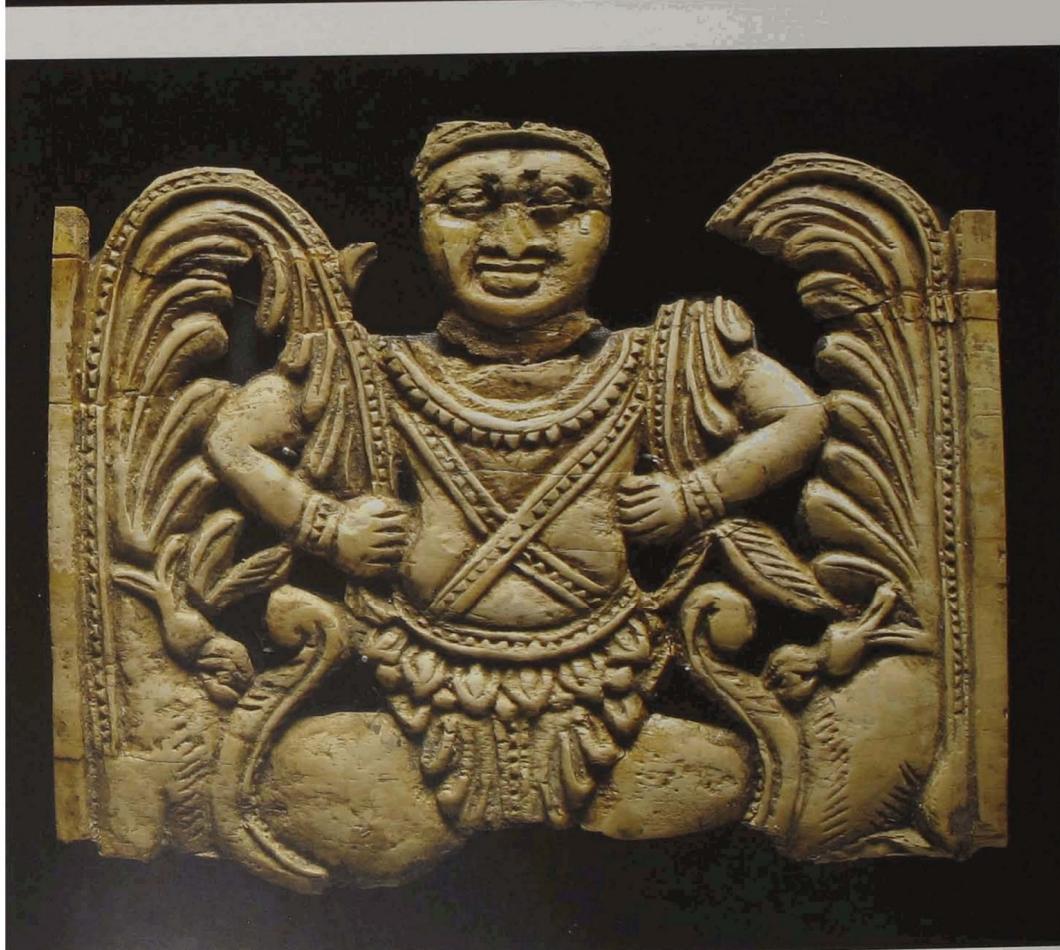
Afghanistan, Begram, project II, chamber 10
1st century AD
Ivory
H 56 cm
National Museum of Afghanistan
MK 04.1.16

150 Recumbent buffalo

Afghanistan, Begram, project II, chamber 10
1st century AD
Ivory
3.0 x 8.2 cm
National Museum of Afghanistan
MK 04.1.26

151 Mythical creature

Afghanistan, Begram, project II, chamber 10
1st century AD
Ivory
8.1 x 10.5 cm
National Museum of Afghanistan
MK 04.1.115





152 **Base of a piece of furniture in the shape of an elephant's head**

Afghanistan, Bagram,
project II, chamber 10
1st century AD
Ivory

7 x 6.5 cm
National Museum of Afghanistan
MK 04.1.34

153 **Elements of chest IX:
passing animals**

Afghanistan, Bagram,
project II, chamber 10
1st century AD
Ivory
6.8 x 17 x 0.2 cm
National Museum of Afghanistan
No inv. no.



154 Elements of chest IX,
panel 11

Afghanistan, Bagram,
project II, chamber 10
1st century AD
Ivory
 $19 \times 8.3 \times 0.2$ cm
National Museum of Afghanistan
No inv. no.

155 Elements of chest IX,
panel 12

Afghanistan, Bagram,
project II, chamber 10
1st century AD
Ivory
 $18.7 \times 5.0 \times 0.3$ cm
National Museum of Afghanistan
No inv. no.

156 **Head of a cavicon animal (buffalo)**

Afghanistan, Begram,
project II, chamber 10
1st century AD
Ivory
 $2.8 \times 5.5 \times 3.2$ cm
National Museum of Afghanistan
No inv. no.



157 **Protruding lion's head**

Afghanistan, Begram,
project II, chamber 10
1st century AD
Ivory
 $4.0 \times 5.5 \times 2.0$ cm
National Museum of Afghanistan
No inv. no.



Glass

158 Blue vase with a *resille*-pattern

Afghanistan, Begram,
project II, chamber 10
1st century AD
Blown glass
H 17.7 cm; Ø 7.3 cm
National Museum of Afghanistan
MK 04.1.35





159 Large goblet with a *resille*-pattern

Afghanistan, Begram,
project II, chamber 10
1st century AD
Blown glass
H 17.8 cm; Ø 10.2 cm
National Museum of Afghanistan
MK 04.1.37



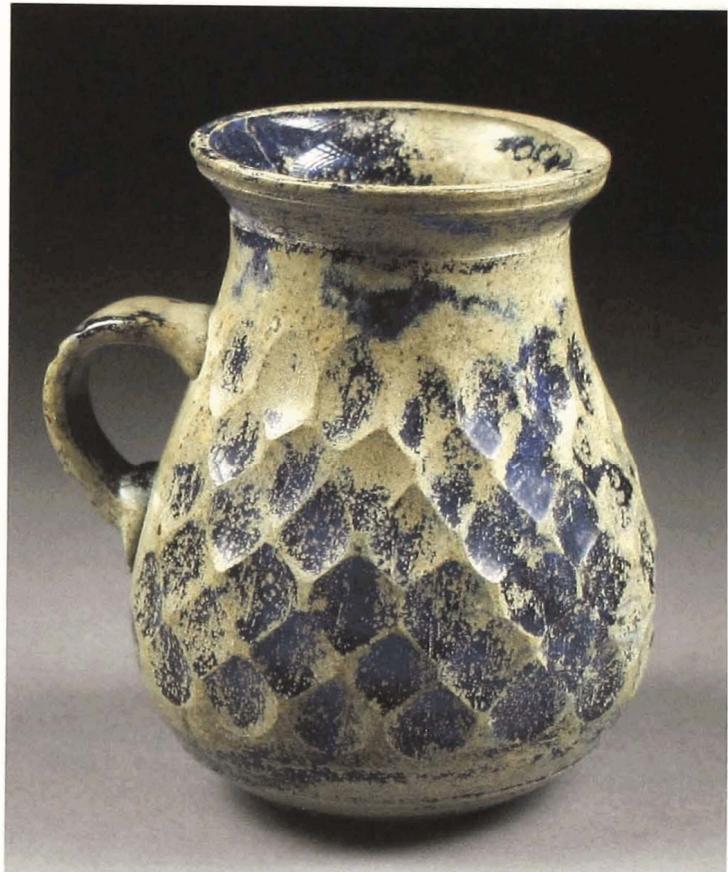
160 Blue vase with a *resille*-pattern

Afghanistan, Begram,
project II, chamber 10
1st century AD
Blown glass
H 22.7 cm; Ø 8.0 cm
National Museum of Afghanistan
MK 04.1.41



161 Vase with handle

Afghanistan, Bagram,
project II, chamber 10
1st century AD
Colourless glass with honeycomb pattern
H 11 cm; Ø 9.2 cm
National Museum of Afghanistan
MK 04.1.42

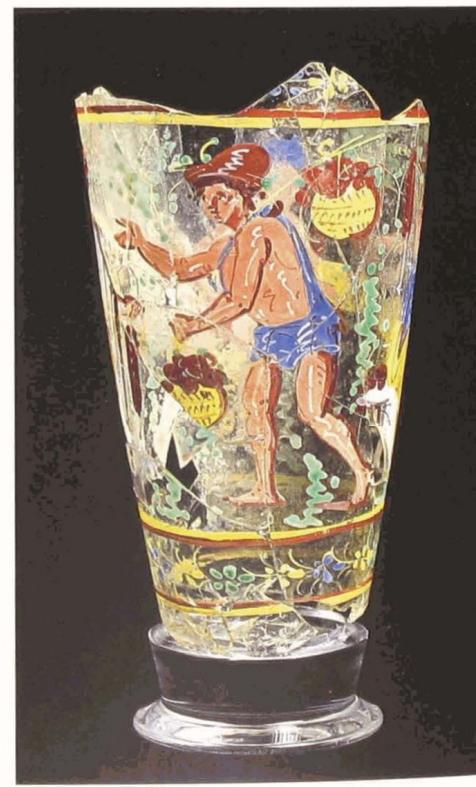
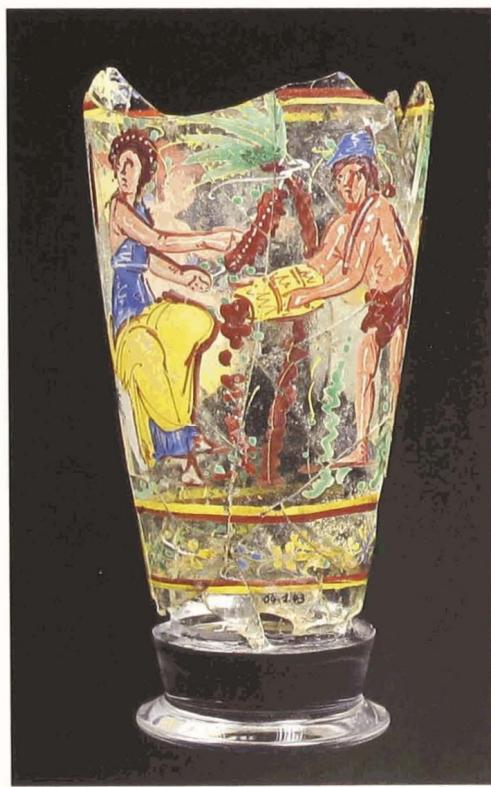
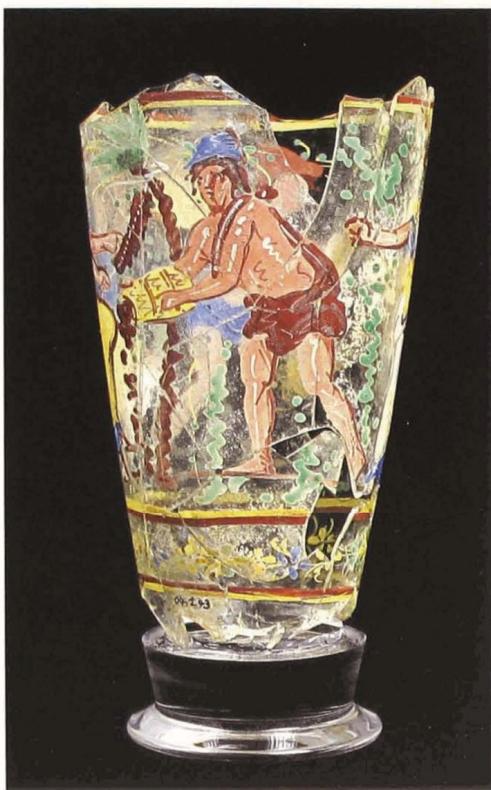


162 Vase with handle

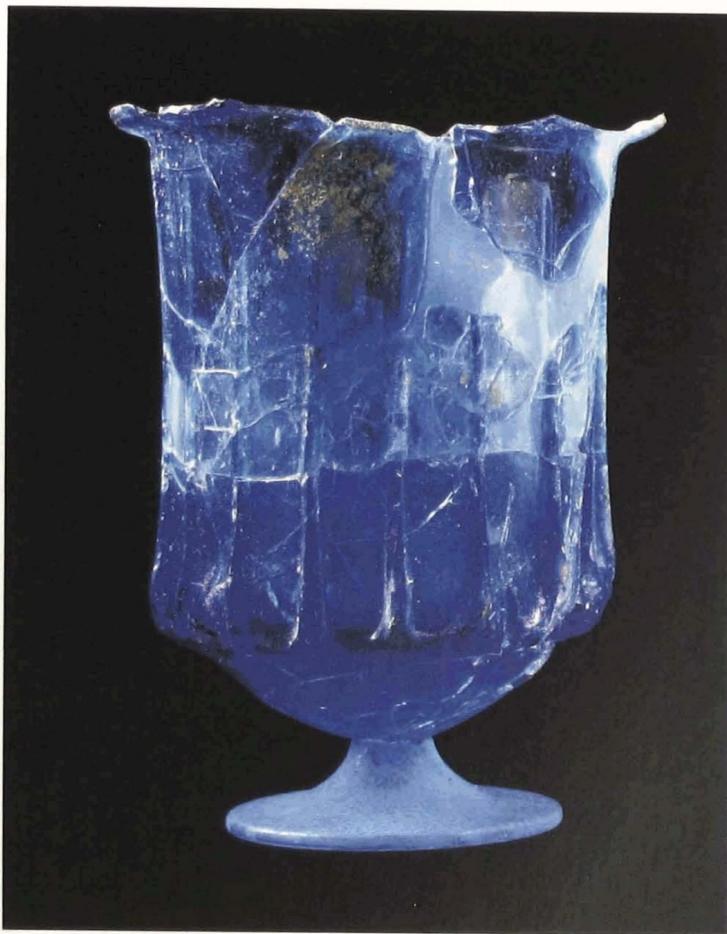
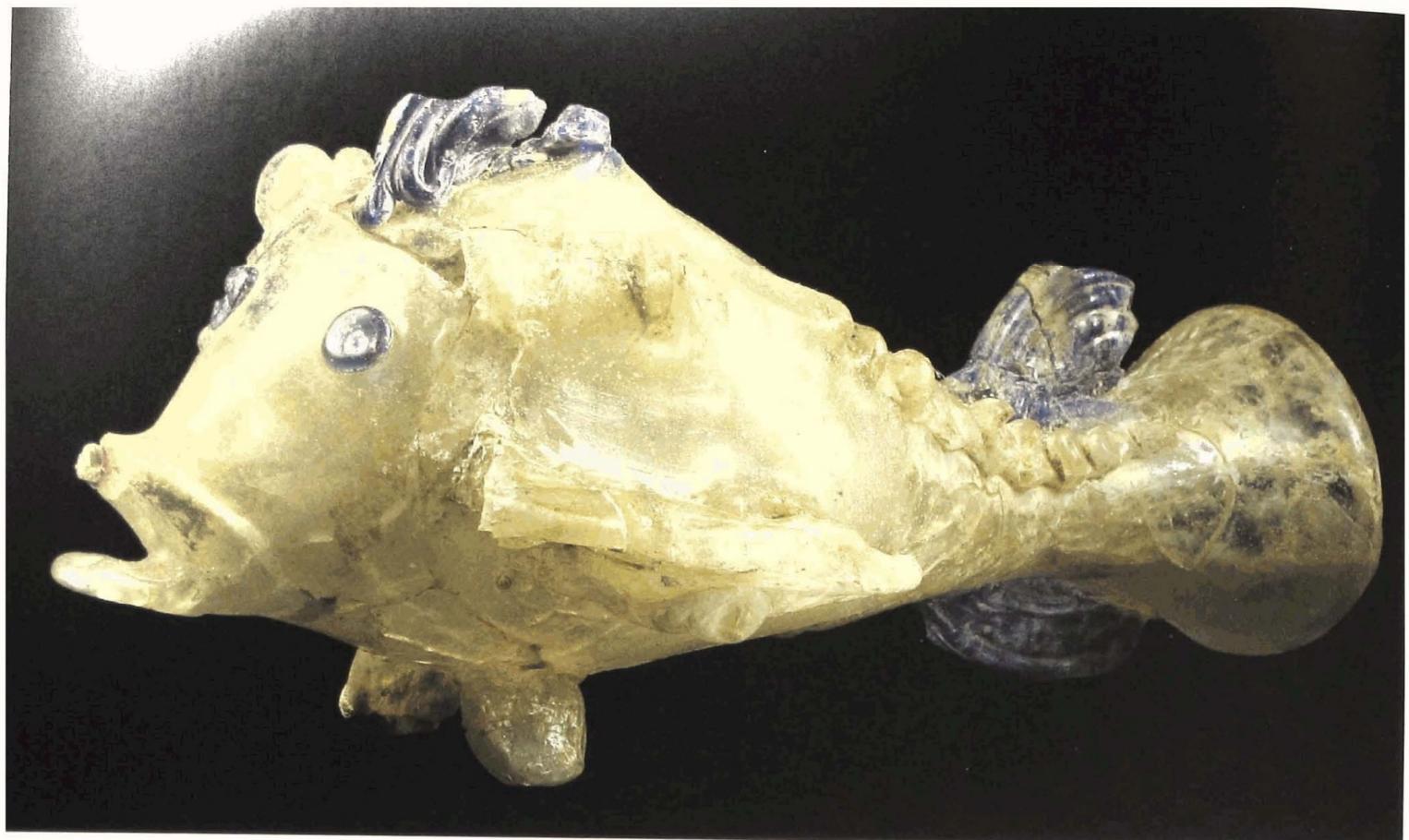
Afghanistan, Bagram,
project II, chamber 10
1st century AD
Blue glass with honeycomb pattern
H 8.9 cm
National Museum of Afghanistan
MK 04.1.44

Painted goblet

Afghanistan, Begram,
project II, chamber 10
1st century AD
Colourless glass
H 12.6 cm; Ø 8.0 cm
National Museum of Afghanistan
MK 04.1.43







164 Flask in the shape of a fish

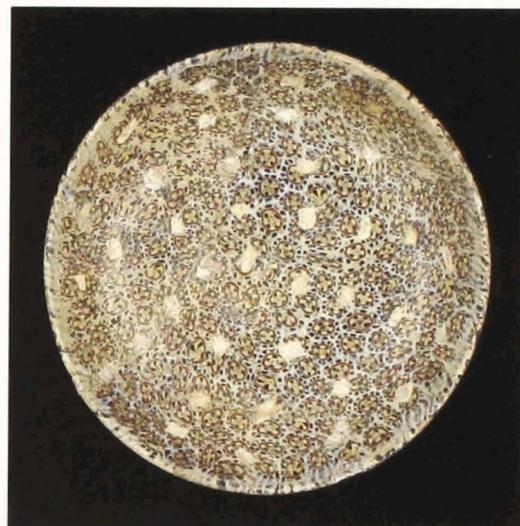
Afghanistan, Bagram,
project II, chamber 10
1st century AD
Blown glass, blue fins and eyes
8.7 x 10.7 x 20 cm
National Museum of Afghanistan
MK 04.1.45

165 Vase on a base

Afghanistan, Bagram,
project II, chamber 10
1st century AD
Blue glass
H 9.0 cm; Ø 6.5 cm
National Museum of Afghanistan
MK 04.1.46

166 Flask in the shape of a fish

Afghanistan, Bagram,
project II, chamber 10
1st century AD
Blown blue glass
7.2 x 30.5 cm
National Museum of Afghanistan
MK 04.1.47



167 Ribbed phiale

Afghanistan, Bagram,
project II, chamber 10
1st century AD
Colourless glass
H 7.0 cm; Ø 23.5 cm
National Museum of Afghanistan
MK 04.1.54

168 Deep plate

Afghanistan, Bagram,
project II, chamber 10
1st century AD
Pâte de verre of a *millefiori*-type
H 4.0 cm; Ø 17.7 cm
National Museum of Afghanistan
MK 04.1.55

169 Flask in the shape of a fish

Afghanistan, Bagram,
project II, chamber 10
1st century AD
Blown glass
7.3 x 20.2 cm
National Museum of Afghanistan
MK 04.1.56





170 *Rhyton on a stem*

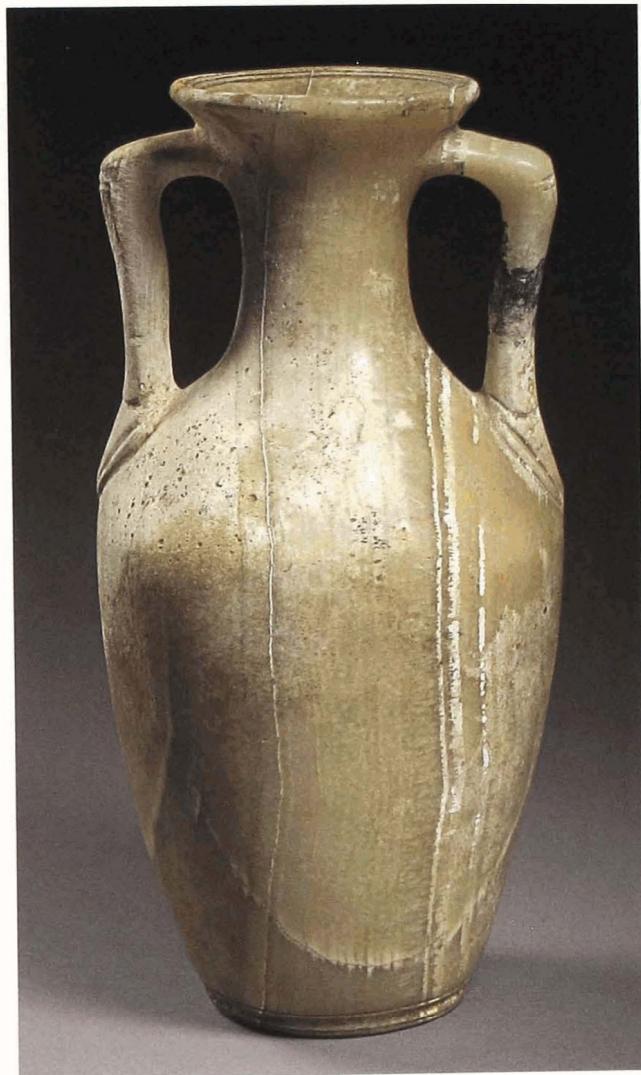
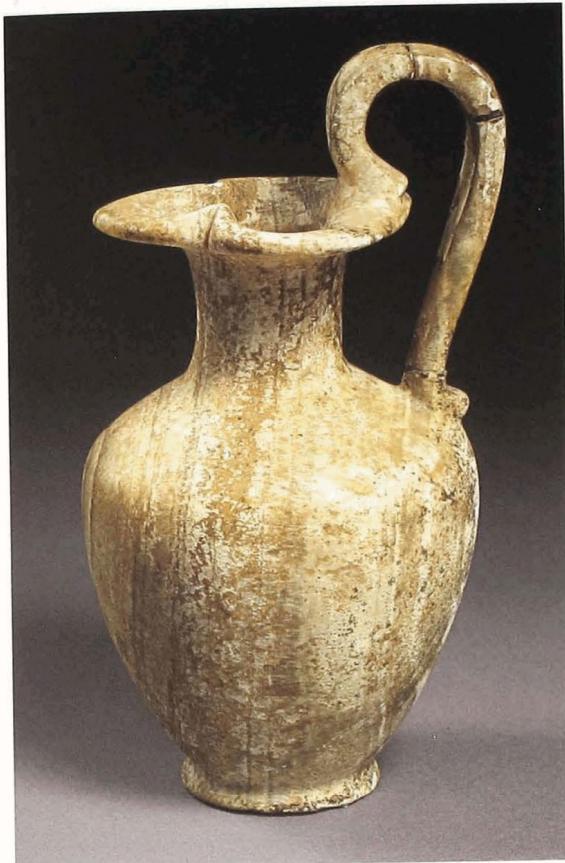
Afghanistan, Bagram,
project II, chamber 10
1st century AD
Brownish glass
16.5 x 13.9 cm
National Museum of Afghanistan
MK 04.1.57

171 *Ribbed phiale*

Afghanistan, Bagram,
project II, chamber 10
1st century AD
Glass imitation agate
Ø 17.2 cm
National Museum of Afghanistan
MK 04.1.82

172 *Large goblet*

Afghanistan, Bagram,
project II, chamber 10
1st century AD
Colourless glass with honeycomb pattern
H 22 cm; Ø 10 cm
National Museum of Afghanistan
MK 04.1.112



Stone

173 **Oenochoe (wine jar) with a trilobite spout**

Afghanistan, Begram,
project II, chamber 10
1st century AD
Alabaster
H 13.35 cm; Ø 8.8 cm
National Museum of Afghanistan
MK 04.1.62



174 **Small amphora**

Afghanistan, Begram,
project II, chamber 10
1st century AD
Alabaster
H 27.3 cm; Ø 13.5 cm
National Museum of Afghanistan
MK 04.1.77

175 **Sacrificial dish with a handle**

Afghanistan, Begram,
project II, chamber 10
1st century AD
Alabaster
Ø 19.3 cm
National Museum of Afghanistan
MK 04.1.83

Bronze

176 **Maple leaf**

Afghanistan, Begram,
project II, chamber 10
1st century AD
Bronze with traces of gilding
12 x 12.6 cm
National Museum of Afghanistan
MK 04.1.64



177 **Handle with two fauns heads**

Afghanistan, Begram,
project II, chamber 10
1st century AD
Bronze inlaid with silver
14 x 4.0 x 6.0 cm
National Museum of Afghanistan
MK 04.1.85



178 **Round dish with fish**

Afghanistan, Begram,
project II, chamber 10
1st century AD
Bronze with traces of gilding
H 3.4 cm; Ø 46 cm
National Museum of Afghanistan
MK 04.1.86





179 **Vessel with two handles**

Afghanistan, Bagram,
project II, chamber 10
1st century AD
Bronze
H 9.0 cm; Ø 28.5 cm
National Museum of Afghanistan
MK 04.1.89

180 **Weight, bust of Athena**

Afghanistan, Bagram,
project II, chamber 10
1st century AD
Bronze
8.9 x 7.8 x 5.1 cm
National Museum of Afghanistan
MK 04.1.100



181 **Vase in the shape of a woman's head**

Afghanistan, Bagram,
project II, chamber 10
1st century AD
Bronze
10.6 x 5.2 cm
National Museum of Afghanistan
MK 04.1.104

182 **Weight in the shape of a helmeted figure**

Afghanistan, Bagram,
project II, chamber 10
1st century AD
Bronze
9.8 x 7.9 x 8.0 cm
National Museum of Afghanistan
MK 04.1.108







Chamber 13

Plaster

183 **Round medallion with a bust of a youth**

Afghanistan, Begram,
project II, chamber 13
1st century AD
Plaster
Ø 22.3 cm
National Museum of Afghanistan
MK 04.1.17

184 **Round medallion with a depiction of a musician and other figures**

Afghanistan, Begram,
project II, chamber 13
1st century AD
Plaster
Ø 15.2 cm
National Museum of Afghanistan
MK 04.1.18



185 **Round medallion with a depiction of a helmeted ephebe**

Afghanistan, Begram,
project II, chamber 13
1st century AD
Plaster
Ø 12.5 cm
National Museum of Afghanistan
MK 04.1.19





186 **Standing statuette of Aphrodite (?:)**

Afghanistan, Begram,
project II, chamber 13
1st century AD
Plaster
H 26.7 cm
National Museum of Afghanistan
MK o4.1.20

187 **Round medallion with a depiction of Ganymede and the eagle of Zeus**

Afghanistan, Begram,
project II, chamber 13
1st century AD
Plaster
Ø 12.8 cm
National Museum of Afghanistan
MK o4.1.22

188 **Round medallion with a depiction of a winged amor**

Afghanistan, Begram,
project II, chamber 13
1st century AD
Plaster
Ø 16.5 cm
National Museum of Afghanistan
MK o4.1.117

189 **Round medallion with vines and bunches of grapes**

Afghanistan, Begram,
project II, chamber 13
1st century AD
Plaster
Ø 12 cm
National Museum of Afghanistan

190 **Round medallion with a depiction of Selene and Endymion**

Afghanistan, Begram,
project II, chamber 13
1st century AD
Plaster
Ø 16 cm
National Museum of Afghanistan



Ivory

191 Large panel with an engraving of a flute player and a woman under a tree

Afghanistan, Bagram,
project II, chamber 13,
collection 34 (34, c.5)
1st century AD
Ivory, engraving
34.6 x 15.4 cm
National Museum of Afghanistan
MK 04.1.21

192 Plaque with a painting of a Jataka-story (the hermit Ekasringa and princess Nalini)

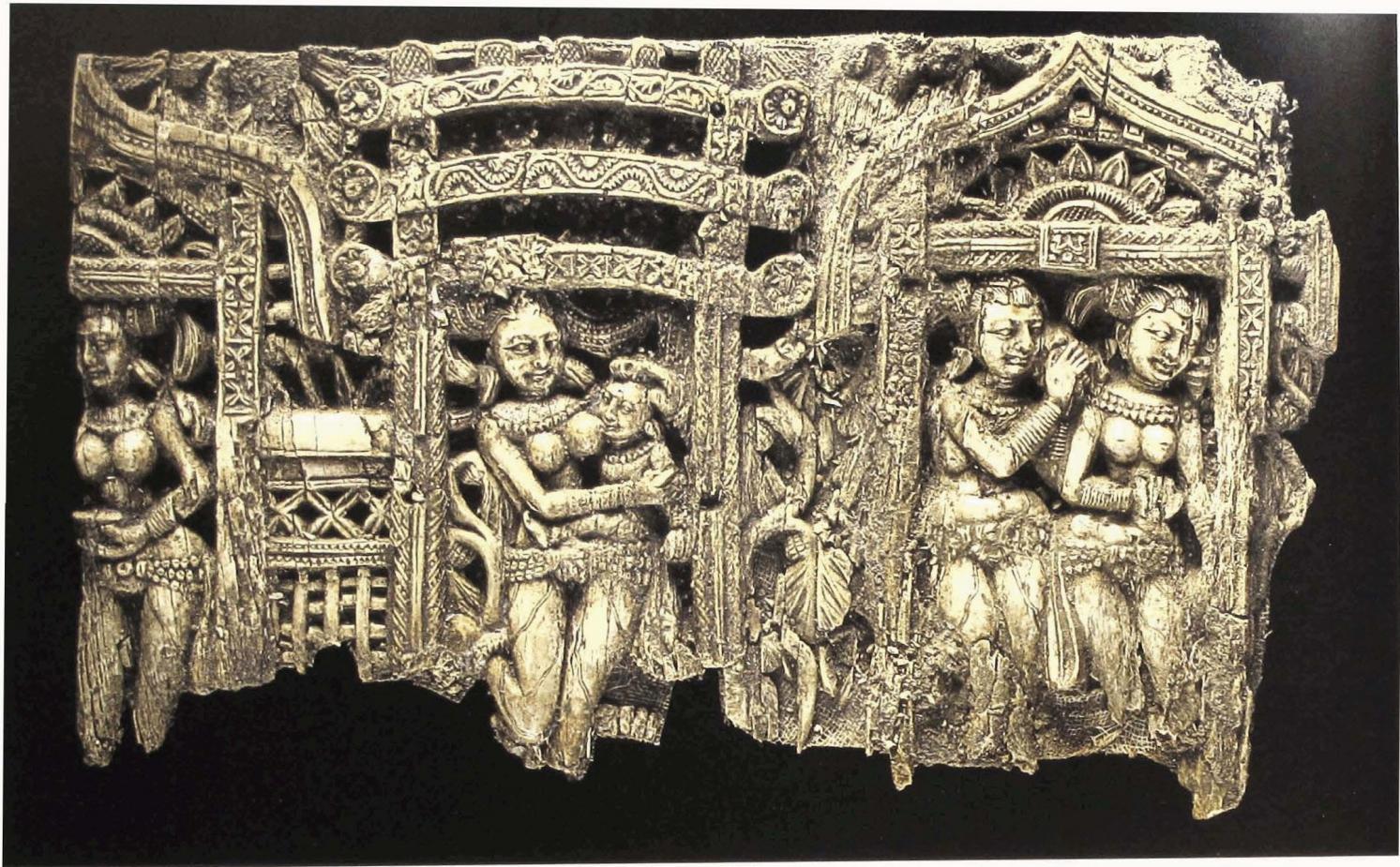
Afghanistan, Bagram,
project II, chamber 13,
collection 55 (55, b)
1st century AD
Ivory with remains of red and black paint
5.9 x 11.3 cm
National Museum of Afghanistan
MK 04.1.23

193 Plaque with a painting of a Jataka-story (the equerry, the king and the royal thoroughbred)

Afghanistan, Bagram,
project II, chamber 13,
collection 55 (55, a)
1st century AD
Ivory with remains of red and black paint
5.8 x 11 cm
National Museum of Afghanistan
MK 04.1.27







194 Openwork panel with a depiction of a woman with a child and two women

Afghanistan, Begram, project II, chamber 13, collection 34 (34, e.6) 1st century AD Ivory, openwork 13.8 x 24.7 cm National Museum of Afghanistan MK 04.1.48



195 Openwork panel with a depiction of women under a *torana* and an Indian bow

Afghanistan, Begram, project II, chamber 13, collection 34 (34, d.6) 1st century AD Ivory, openwork 16 x 15.3 cm National Museum of Afghanistan





196 Openwork panel with a depiction of a woman with flowing hair

Afghanistan, Bagram, project II, chamber 13, collection 34 (34, b.6) 1st century AD Ivory, openwork 15.8 x 16.1 cm National Museum of Afghanistan MK 04.1.52

197 Openwork panel with a depiction of a woman under a torana near an Ashoka tree

Afghanistan, Bagram, project II, chamber 13, collection 34 (34, g.6) 1st century AD Ivory, openwork 16 x 13.3 cm National Museum of Afghanistan MK 04.1.53



198 Relief panel with a palace tableau

Afghanistan, Begram,
project II, chamber 13,
collection 34 (34, a.8)
1st century AD
Ivory
7.6 x 17.4 cm
National Museum of Afghanistan
MK 04.1.58



199 Relief panel with a palace tableau

Afghanistan, Begram,
project II, chamber 13,
collection 34 (34, b.9)
1st century AD
Ivory
7.5 x 18.2 cm
National Museum of Afghanistan
MK 04.1.59



200 Relief panel with a palace tableau

Afghanistan, Begram,
project II, chamber 13,
collection 191 (191, h)
1st century AD
Ivory
8.3 x 15.1 cm
National Museum of Afghanistan
MK 04.1.68



201 Relief panel with a palace tableau

Afghanistan, Begram,
project II, chamber 13,
collection 150 (150, p.5.3)
1st century AD
Ivory
8.1 x 13.8 cm
National Museum of Afghanistan
MK 04.1.69



202 Relief panel with a palace tableau

Afghanistan, Begram,
project II, chamber 13,
collection 150 (150, p.5.1)
1st century AD
Ivory
8.9 x 15.2 cm
National Museum of Afghanistan
MK 04.1.70



203 Relief panel with a palace tableau

Afghanistan, Begram,
project II, chamber 13,
collection 150 (150, p.5.2)
1st century AD
Ivory
8.7 x 15.5 cm
National Museum of Afghanistan
MK 04.1.71





204 Relief panel with a palace tableau

Afghanistan, Begram,
project II, chamber 13,
collection 191 (191, g)
1st century AD
Ivory
8.2 x 14.7 cm
National Museum of Afghanistan
MK 04.1.72

206 Relief panel with a palace tableau

Afghanistan, Begram,
project II, chamber 13,
collection 191 (191, j)
1st century AD
Ivory
8.4 x 20 cm
National Museum of Afghanistan
MK 04.1.74

205 Relief panel with a palace tableau

Afghanistan, Begram,
project II, chamber 13,
collection 150 (150, p.5)
1st century AD
Ivory
9.1 x 15.1 cm
National Museum of Afghanistan
MK 04.1.73

207 Relief panel with a palace tableau

Afghanistan, Begram,
project II, chamber 13,
collection 191 (191, i)
1st century AD
Ivory
8.3 x 20 cm
National Museum of Afghanistan
MK 04.1.75





208 Large relief panel with a depiction of two women standing under a *torana*

Afghanistan, Bagram,
project II, chamber 13,
collection 34 (34, b. 5)
1st century AD
Ivory, large relief panel
42.7 x 24.6 cm
National Museum of Afghanistan
MK 04.1.113



209 Console with an Amazon on a griffin

Afghanistan, Bagram,
project II, chamber 13
1st century AD
Ivory
H 30 cm
National Museum of Afghanistan
MK 04.1.116

Glass

210 *Oenochoe (wine jar) with a high handle*

Afghanistan, Begram,
project II, chamber 13

1st century AD

Bluish grey glass with
use of gold leaf

H 21.4 cm

National Museum of Afghanistan
MK 04.1.33



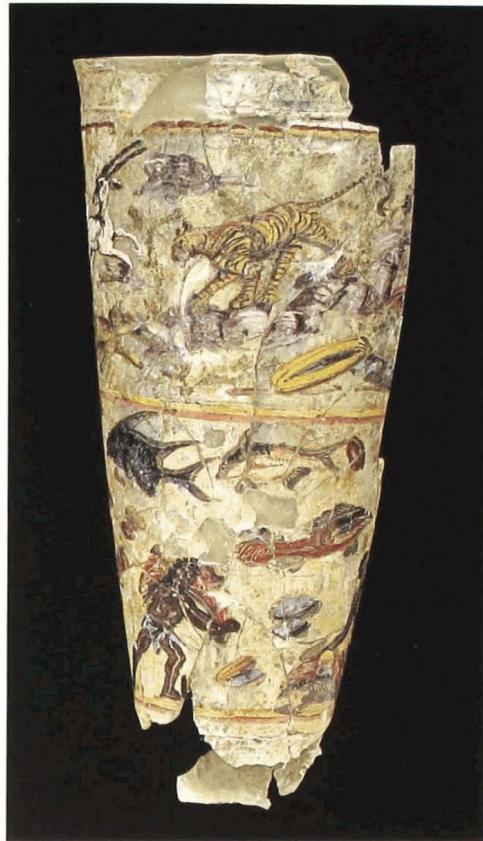
Large goblet with a painting of the fight between Achilles and Hector

Afghanistan, Begram,
project II, chamber 13
1st century AD
Colourless glass
H 24.3 cm; Ø 13.4 cm
National Museum of Afghanistan
MK 04.1.38

Out of all the restoration work completed at the Musée Guimet, the restoration of the glass ware was the most spectacular, because the glass is often broken in many pieces and some pieces were even glued on to gauze, kept together with a tiny copper wire. The task was particularly trying because the substance and the brightness of the colours had to be accentuated. The photographic archives and documentation pertaining to Begram kept in Paris, and collected by Pierre Hamelin during the excavations and later, after the Second World War, from the National Museum of Afghanistan, were examined meticulously to be able to reproduce the transparency of the glass and the elegant shapes of the vases as accurately as possible. The largest painted glass was the only one to be displayed on a piece of Perspex with dimensions identical to the object's measurements; because of this it became the most exquisite piece of the whole collection. Regarding size, this exemplar is also the most impressive one out of the whole collection kept in Paris and Kabul. The paintings of horsemen, foot soldiers and fierce combats have been incorporated in two registers with unexpected ease, and they attest to an incredible virtuosity.

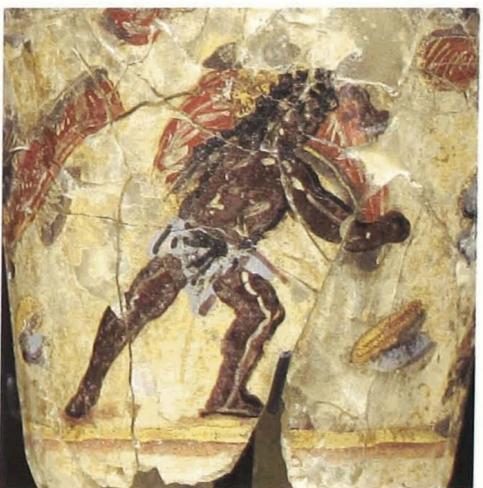
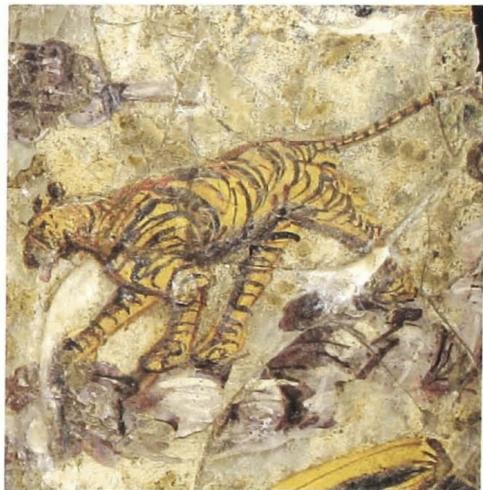
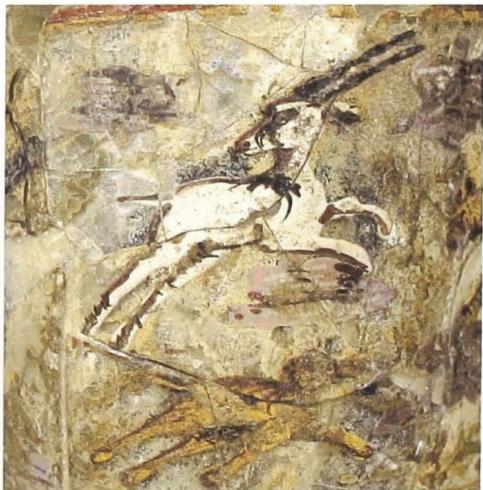
In fact, the painted glass ware from Begram is an echo of the great artistic paintings from the Hellenistic era. They stand out because of the strong sense of colour, the tremendous freedom in the working method, the powerful strokes and the sometimes nearly expressionistic manner in which the figures and space have been outlined; this technique is far removed from any academic characteristics.





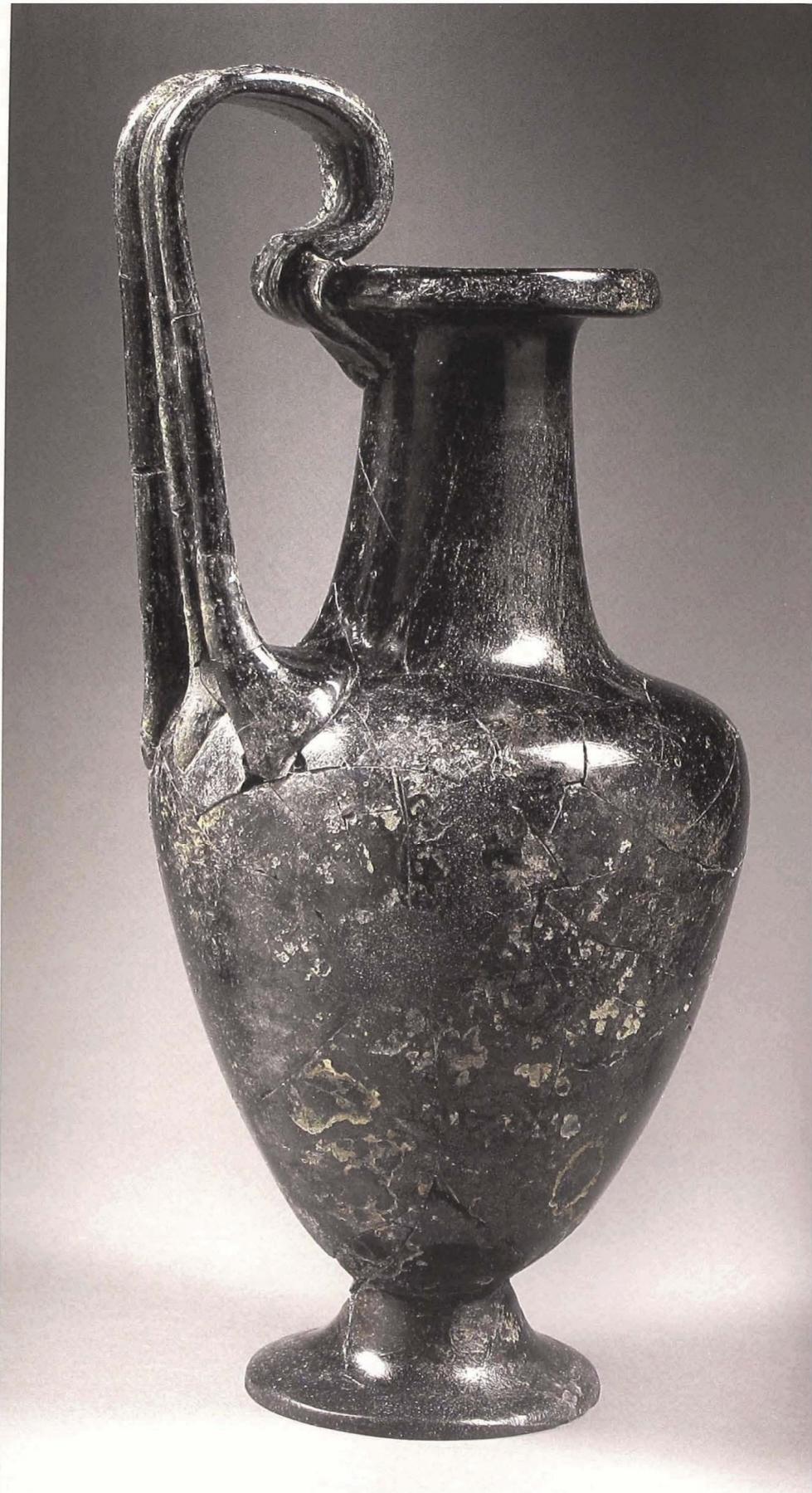
212 Large goblet with painted fish and hunting scenes

Afghanistan, Begram,
project II, chamber 13
1st century AD
Colourless glass
H 24.8 cm; Ø 11.7 cm
National Museum of Afghanistan
MK 04.1.39



213 Large *oenochoe* (wine jar)

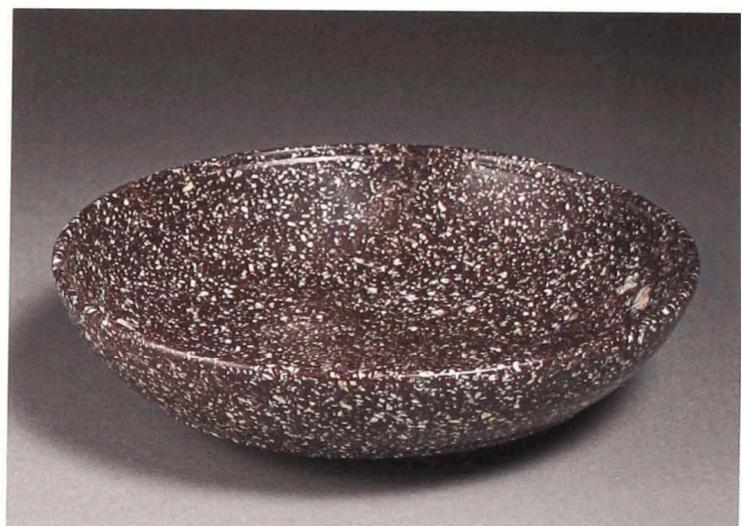
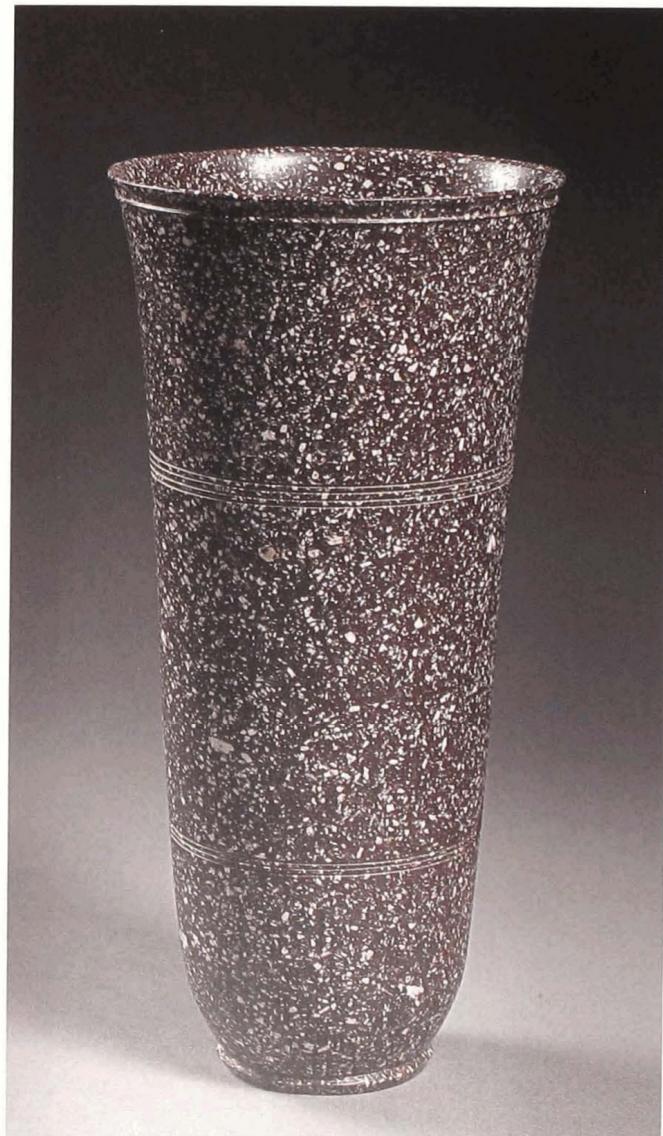
Afghanistan, Bagram,
project II, chamber 13
1st century AD
Bluish-black glass
H 28.8 cm
National Museum of Afghanistan
MK 04.1.66



Stone

214 Kantharos

Afghanistan, Bagram,
project II, chamber 13
1st century AD
Cut rock-crystal with gold residue
H 9.0 cm; Ø 14.45 cm
National Museum of Afghanistan
MK 04.1.36



< 215 Elongated goblet

Afghanistan, Bagram,
project II, chamber 13
1st century AD
Porphyry
H 25.38 cm; Ø 11.8 cm
National Museum of Afghanistan
MK 04.1.65

216 Deep dish

Afghanistan, Bagram,
project II, chamber 13
1st century AD
Porphyry
H 4.5 cm; Ø 18.5 cm
National Museum of Afghanistan
MK 04.1.67



Bronze

217 Weight, bust of Mercury

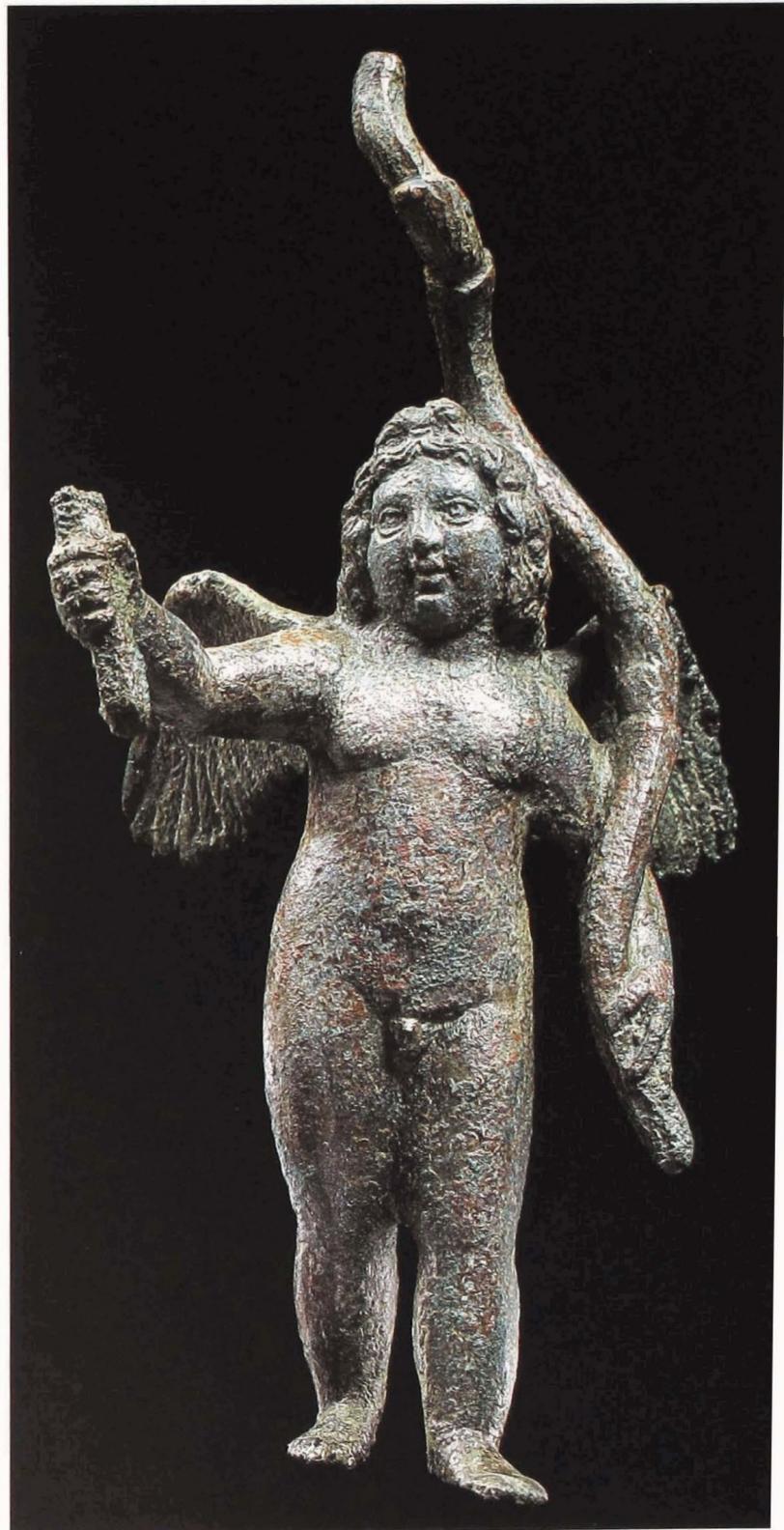
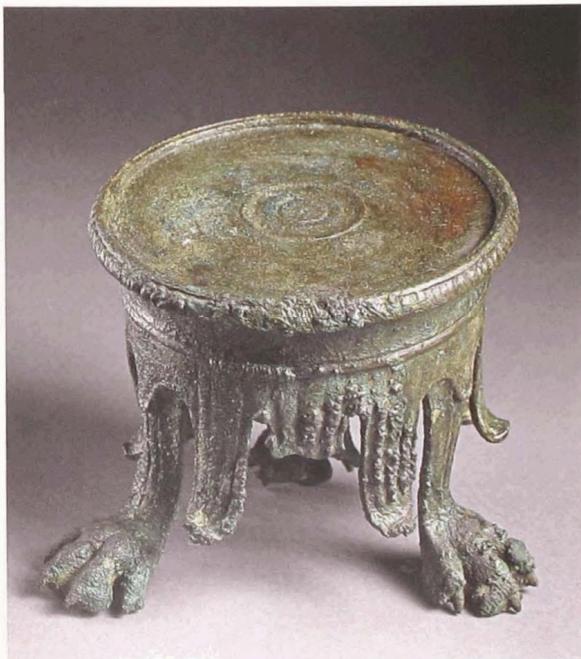
Afghanistan, Bagram,
project II, chamber 13
1st century AD
Bronze
8.4 cm x 6.8 cm
National Museum of Afghanistan
MK 04.1.30

218 Winged Eros with a lamp in his hand

Afghanistan, Bagram,
project II, chamber 13
1st century AD
Solid cast bronze
H 15.2 cm
National Museum of Afghanistan
MK 04.1.31

219 Table on a tripod

Afghanistan, Bagram,
project II, chamber 13
1st century AD
Bronze
H 9.0 cm; Ø 9.5 cm
National Museum of Afghanistan
MK 04.1.32





<220 **Serapis-Heracles**

Afghanistan, Bagram,
project II, chamber 13
1st century AD
Solid cast bronze
24.1 x 6.45 cm
National Museum of Afghanistan
MK 04.1.90



221 > **Mask of Silenus**

Afghanistan, Bagram,
project II, chamber 13
1st century AD
Bronze
9.5 x 7.9 cm
National Museum of Afghanistan
MK 04.1.91



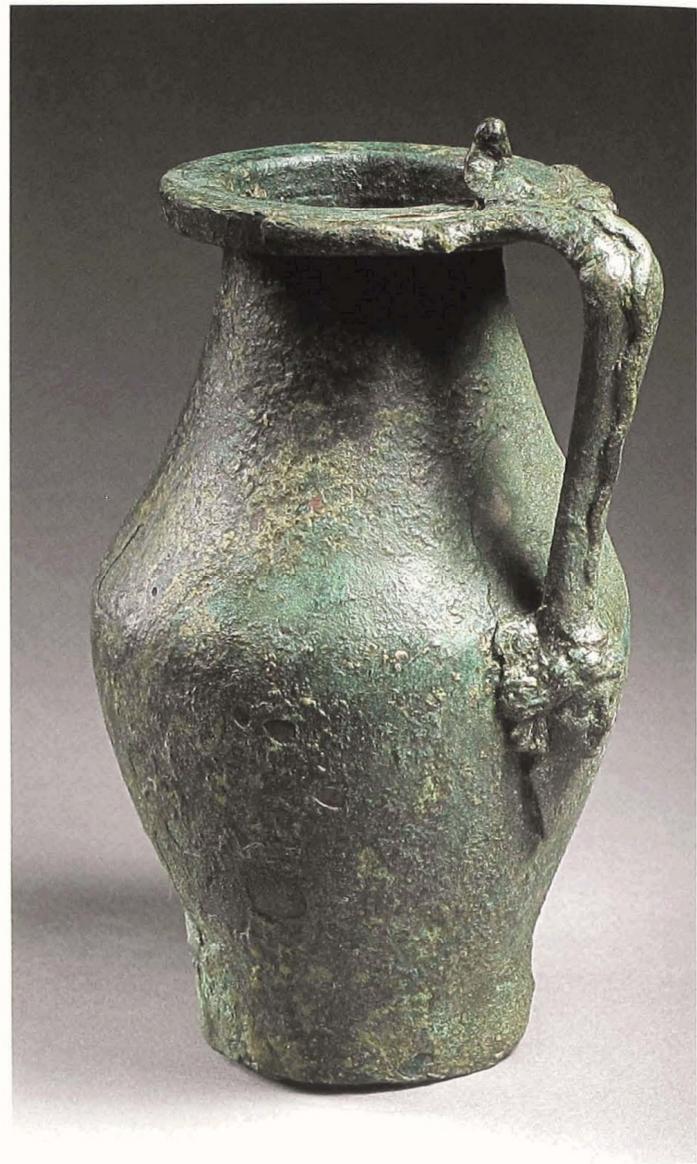
222 **Barbarian horseman**

Afghanistan, Bagram,
project II, chamber 13
1st century AD
Bronze (solid cast)
14.7 x 4.7 cm
National Museum of Afghanistan
MK 04.1.92



223 Jug with a handle decorated with a snake and a mask

Afghanistan, Bagram,
project II, chamber 13
1st century AD
Bronze
H 17 cm; Ø 10.3 cm
National Museum of Afghanistan
MK 04.1.94



224 Jug with a handle decorated with a snake

Afghanistan, Bagram,
project II, chamber 13
1st century AD
Bronze
H 15.2 cm; Ø 10.6 cm
National Museum of Afghanistan
MK 04.1.95



225 **The god Harpocrates, son of Isis and Serapis**

Afghanistan, Begram,
project II, chamber 13
1st century AD
Bronze (solid cast)
13.3 cm
National Museum of Afghanistan
MK 04.1.101

226 **Cock with a human face**

Afghanistan, Begram,
project II, chamber 13
1st century AD
Bronze (solid cast)
5.4 x 6 cm
National Museum of Afghanistan
MK 04.1.102



Bronze

227 Young horseman, 'Alexander'

Afghanistan, Bagram,
project II, chamber R.T.
1st century AD
Bronze (hollow statue)
13.5 x 3.5 cm
National Museum of Afghanistan
MK 04.1.28

Ceramics

228 Pitcher in the shape of a bird-woman

Afghanistan, Bagram,
project II, chamber 13
1st century AD
Ceramic with bluish-green enamel
20.2 x 13 x 21.8 cm
National Museum of Afghanistan
MK 04.1.84



Appendices

From restoration to analysis, the example of a bronze bowl from Begram

Perseus and the Gorgon Medusa

In the catalogue of objects excavated in 1937 in Begram, Joseph Hackin provides a short description of the chased and painted figures on the upper part of one of the two round bowls which emerged during excavation project II. He describes marine animals: several types of fish with mobile fins and tails among the painted waves on the surface of the plate. Despite the dreadful condition of the object, and the corroded bronze, Hackin identified a figure in the centre, namely the mask of the Gorgon Medusa, with wide-open wings and snakes in her hair. The Gorgons, three in total, were called Stheno, Euryale and Medusa. In earlier times, they used to be exceptionally beautiful, but they provoked Pallas Athena's wrath, and she transformed them into grotesque creatures whose gaze could turn humans into stone.

On the left-hand side, Hackin sees some sort of stone mound with in the middle a half opened door in which a figure is standing holding an object in its hand, perhaps a sword hilt. It is highly probable that this is the hero Perseus, who went to the island of the Gorgons and appeared in their hiding place; this is symbolised by the half opened door. Perseus had boasted to King Polydectes that he could return with the head of the Gorgon Medusa, the only mortal Gorgon. The figure of Perseus is painted; the object in his hand is probably the scimitar given to him by the god Hermes, the only weapon able to resist Medusa's tough scales. To overcome the monster, Perseus needed additional attributes from the gods. The nymphs from the river Styx provided him with the helmet of Hades (god of the Underworld) that made the wearer invisible, the pouch to carry the severed head, and the winged sandals from the god Hermes, the messenger of Zeus. Pallas Athena also intervened by giving him her highly-polished bronze shield, on which he could catch Medusa's deadly gaze. Once Perseus had managed to sever Medusa's head, on his return journey he came across Andromeda, the daughter of the Ethiopian king Cepheus. She was chained to the rocky shores as an offering to appease the sea monster that had taken offence following the arrogant comments from Cassiopeia, Andromeda's mother, who had boasted that she and her daughter were more beautiful than the Nereids, the divinely beautiful sea nymphs.



Perseus fell instantly in love with the stunning Andromeda and with the scimitar of Hermes he slew the monster that was about to overwhelm her.

Joseph Hackin also mentions two figures in the right-hand corner. One of the two is plump and has mobile forearms; the other has mobile attached wings. Although this illustration is extremely unconventional, it is most likely that it represents the naked Andromeda, kept out of the waves by a small winged figure flying above her, probably the young god Eros, symbol of the dawning love between Perseus and the tormented princess.

The shield given by Pallas Athena to Perseus is not present on the depiction. This absence is most remarkable, albeit, taking the circular gadrooned shape into account, it is fairly plausible that this magnificent bronze piece in itself could be considered as the actual shield. In this case, the depiction in the centre of the shield would not be the severed head of Andromeda but rather the reflection of her face on the shield.

By regarding the discovered object as an ornamental shield, Hackin would have been virtually correct; however he considered it as an actual defensive weapon, whereas in all probability it should have been considered symbolic.

Gonzague Quivron,
Centre National de la Recherche Scientifique (French National Centre for Scientific Research) /Musée Guimet, UMR 9993

< Circular bowl with fish,
Begram, chamber 10 (cat. no. 178)
National Museum of Afghanistan
Photograph Thierry Ollivier

Detail of the central figure (Medusa)

Paintings on the bronze bowl from Begram: a new discovery during the restoration

The restoration of the bronze bowl prompted a new discovery on account of the very exceptional polychrome paintings which became visible on the surface. These paintings are truly unique, since we know of no other exemplars of such painted bronze dating back to Antiquity.

The object consists of a bronze disc with a maritime scene and a circular gadrooned edge. These two parts most probably did not belong together at the outset; they must have been plastered together during an earlier restoration. In his excavation report, Joseph Hackin mentions a decorative shield accompanied by several other elements: a second, larger disc, a bronze hoop, wood remains and a sheet of glass. According to Sophie Descamps, curator at the Musée du Louvre, it is part of one of the sometimes striking table decorations used by the Romans for their banquets. Decorative bowls were filled with smoke or water during their grand dinner parties. However, whichever theory is correct, the bowl from Begram is incomplete; and as is often the case, only the decorated parts were kept and assembled. The painting on the bowl is remarkable because of the extraordi-

nary mobility of the fins and fishtails. The arms of the first figure and the wings of the other are also very flexible, like those of the mask of Medusa in the centre of the bowl. The fins have been carved from a thin bronze sheet and each one has been provided with a small, narrow tongue which fits perfectly in the tiny openings on the disc. These narrow tongues have been pierced and affixed to the underside of the disc with tiny leaded rings, which make the fins move the instant the disc is moved. In total, around eighty elements are mobile. This is exceptionally imaginative; all the more because the elements continue to move once the disc has been put down.

When the bowl arrived in Paris from Kabul, it had faded into a very dark colour due to the many layers of wax and varnish added over the years. This made the surface look extremely shiny and uniform, and the adornments were difficult to distinguish. The object was simply cleansed with acetone to remove the dark brown remains of the old protective layers until it once again appeared like an archaeological piece of bronze covered with copper oxides, consisting of red ochre cuprite and carbonates composed of green malachite. As the cleansing progressed, the adornments became more visible, which made the black lines of the waves and scales stand out a little more too. At the left-hand top a check pattern became visible; the white and blue lines on the backs of the fish, the irises in the eyes of the fish, the black hair of the figures and the red highlights all became gradually more visible.

It would be interesting to analyse the pigments used



Underside

by the painter and to compare these with other works from the same period, such as lead-white and cinnabarred (mercury sulphide) pigments. The white line on the top right-hand side, which portrays the extended mouth of a plump fish – particularly natural and lively – reminds us of Roman frescos.

Once the varnish was removed, the surface was examined meticulously. This examination resulted in the discovery of white lines at the bottom of the sea, the extremely fine whiskers of a fish, a mollusc and many other little details that could not be seen at first. The depicted fish types also appear on other mosaics and frescos, but one in particular is conspicuous in its deformity, its extremely large, wide-open mouth that has caught something circular, and the three-pronged shape of its fins. The unusual and fearsome appearance suggests that this was a mythical monster.

The paint on the back of the fish provides a subtle but strikingly iridescent impression. After a tiny piece of metallic sheet was discovered on the back of one fish during the cleaning procedure, this iridescent effect could be accredited to the use of precious metals in the paint. It is probably gold or electrum; no silver, because this would soon turn black due to corrosion.

Unfortunately, the head of Medusa was cleaned improperly in earlier times; as a result, not much is left of the surface treatment and the paint. However, this cleaning method was only applied to the head; the rest of the bowl still shows paint remains. The check pattern was visible on the excavation photographs from 1937 and Joseph Hackin described it thoroughly. This painting was added during the making of the object; the idea that it was added afterwards can be ruled out. The maritime elements, which were added with a chasing-chisel, are rather imprecise and often incomplete, without accurate details. This can be seen for instance in the mythical monster, only the chest of which is chased in bronze; the head was painted, which proves that painting was crucial for the conception of the scene.

After removing the varnish, the disc was separated from the gadrooned edge to which it had been attached with plaster during an earlier restoration. The underside of the disc was decorated with flower patterns. Some of the leaded rings that provide the movement are still original; others were replaced by tiny pieces of coiled metal. Still on the underside, there are two square lead elements



Detail of the edge and a fish

Detail (Perseus)

with little openings, which were soldered on to receive the narrow tongues during the disc's assembly. There is also an incomplete third element connected to the underside of the disc.

Due to lack of time, the restoration of this piece was limited. Nevertheless, through gentle cleansing with solvents, an exceptional painted decoration on the bronze, which were imperceptible at first, became visible. This article is merely a brief introduction; a more comprehensive study of the object will follow. It should be interesting to compare this bronze bowl from the National Museum of Afghanistan with the bowl kept in the Musée Guimet. And although this object must be subjected to additional examination, research and analyses, even now it is a unique object, which can now be admired during the exhibition together with the painting work.

Fabienne D'Allava,
Restorer of Archaeological objects

Substance analysis: examination of the inlaid stones and gold of Tillya-tepe

Methods and equipment

The inlaid gold of Tillya-tepe was analysed using a portable gemmological laboratory called the PORTALAB; it permits gemmological basic measurements and can be used to identify gemstones anywhere. The box contains a binocular microscope with fibre optic light source to study the microscopic structures of stones (mineral inclusions, fissures, zoning, etc.). The refraction index of the cabochons (cut stones) is measured with an Abbe refractometer, using the indirect method. The fluorescence of the stones, more particularly of the turquoise and amber, was tested with short and long wave UV rays. The bulk density of the stones removed from their sockets was obtained by immersing the stones in a reference solution. The pleochroism (where different colours are transmitted depending upon crystallographic orientation) was assessed using a small dichroscope, the absorption spectrum in the visible with a handheld spectroscope.

Chemical composition was determined by X-fluorescence, for which a portable device (fig. 1) was used, designed by the Centre de Recherche et de Restauration des Musées de France. It needs to be emphasised that this excellent analysis process is not in the slightest way detrimental to the object and that it can be used without any contact between the device and the object. The instrument is based on an X-ray tube of molybdenum and an electrically cooled X-ray detector. For the Tillya-tepe objects, two different working methods were used: the inlaid stones, which consisted of light minerals, were analysed with an 8 kV voltage and a helium gas flow (fig. 1), whilst the gold was analysed with a 50 kV voltage combined with a 30 µm thick copper filter.





Fig. 1 X-fluorescence device

Fig. 2 Analysis of inlay work

Results

Turquoise

The inlaid work from Tillya-tepe consist mainly of turquoise. The name turquoise refers to Turkey, where the important supply routes used to run during the Middle Ages. To mineralogists, turquoise is a deep blue cryptocrystalline mineral, which is fairly hard (approximately 6 on the Mohs scale), with a density between 2.6 and 2.9, depending on the quality. Turquoise consists of hydrated copper aluminium phosphate; it is an opaque stone with a conchoidal fracture and a waxy lustre. It is a proven fact that this precious stone was used as early as the first Egyptian dynasty, circa 3200 BC, but it might have been used even earlier in Afghanistan. The objects from Tillya-tepe are inlaid with turquoise which in general was first cut into shape, and then re-cut (cabochon) in a teardrop shape. The colour of this turquoise varies between blue and green, and sometimes it can even be brown. It depends on the chosen raw material, but the shade also changes if the object has been buried in the ground for a long time. The delicate tur-

quoise mineral is sensitive to its environment and it is prone to desiccation, in which case it changes to green. A number of stones have turned green to a certain degree but some parts still have their original blue colour, whilst other parts have become brown. In certain cases, when the turquoise has been overly affected, it resembles a whitish, powdery substance.

Known deposits of turquoise could be found in Egypt, more particularly in Sinai and Nubia, although the turquoise found in the Tillya-tepe objects probably came from Iran (Nishapur turquoise mines in Khorasan). It could however also originate from smaller deposits in Uzbekistan (Kyzylkum desert), Tibet or China (Hubei province). The turquoise deposits are shown on the map (fig. 3). Chemical analysis by X-fluorescence revealed the presence of copper, phosphorus and aluminium, which enter in the composition of natural turquoise, but it also revealed iron and zinc; this may well uncover the origins of the stones. However, as appears from an earlier examination, establishing the origin of turquoise on the basis of the chemical composition is not always accurate, because its composition varies strongly for each inlaid work, and reference material from ancient deposits is scarce or nonexistent.

Lapis lazuli

The next most used stone for the inlaid work from Tillya-tepe after turquoise is lapis lazuli. This semi-precious stone owes its intense blue colour to the lazurite mineral, which often contains gold-coloured pyrite fragments; this is why lapis lazuli is occasionally compared to a starry sky. Lapis lazuli can also contain white elements (calcite and sometimes feldspar). The Tillya-tepe objects are inlaid with small pieces of lapis lazuli combined or alternated with turquoise. The pyrite inclusions and white calcite veins can be seen through a binocular magnifier. The only known ancient deposits of lapis lazuli are situated in the present day Afghanistan, to be precise near Sar-i Sang in the Badakhshan province, in the Hindu Kush Mountains, which can reach up to 6000 metres in height. The mining of Afghan lapis lazuli

began around the third millennium BC and it was exported to all the countries belonging to the Graeco-Roman civilisation. Two smaller deposits of lapis lazuli can be found in the north of the Pamir Mountains in Tajikistan and in the Chagai Hills in Pakistan.

Pyrite

Pyrite (iron sulphide) can also be found in numerous objects from Tillya-tepe. The original mineral has a brass-gold hue although here it has faded to dark-brown with a metallic sheen. The pyrite is combined with turquoise and lapis lazuli and has been inlaid in flat elements (the pendant, cat. no. 97 and the almond-shaped insert in the necklace, cat. no. 129). Chemical analysis through X-fluorescence shows that these elements exclusively consist of iron and sulphur (fig. 4), which is in line with the mineral's nature. Note that although pyrite is a quite common mineral, it is scarcely used in precious metal work.

Chalcedony

Several varieties of chalcedony (microcrystalline quartz) have been inlaid in the jewels from Tillya-tepe. Amber-red carnelian has been cut into tiny semicircular cabochons, for instance to represent the eyes of the monsters (see cat. no. 61). A brown-white cameo (cat. no. 116) has been cut from sard, whilst a rather large gem representing a griffin (cat. no. 132) was carved from white jasper. The Indian Deccan Plateau was an important deposit for all chalcedony varieties, which were cut, drilled and polished in workshops, and then exported to distant places.

Amber

Amber, a fossil resin from prehistoric conifers, can be found in various objects. For instance, shaped as a lion (pendant, cat. no. 131), but also shaped as oval cabochons (bracelet, cat. no. 127), or as semicircular cabochons (ring, cat. no. 57). The cabochons have many inclusions (tiny pieces of other materials) and appear a little cracked, because this organic material has dried up. Ancient amber essentially originates from the Baltic Sea area,

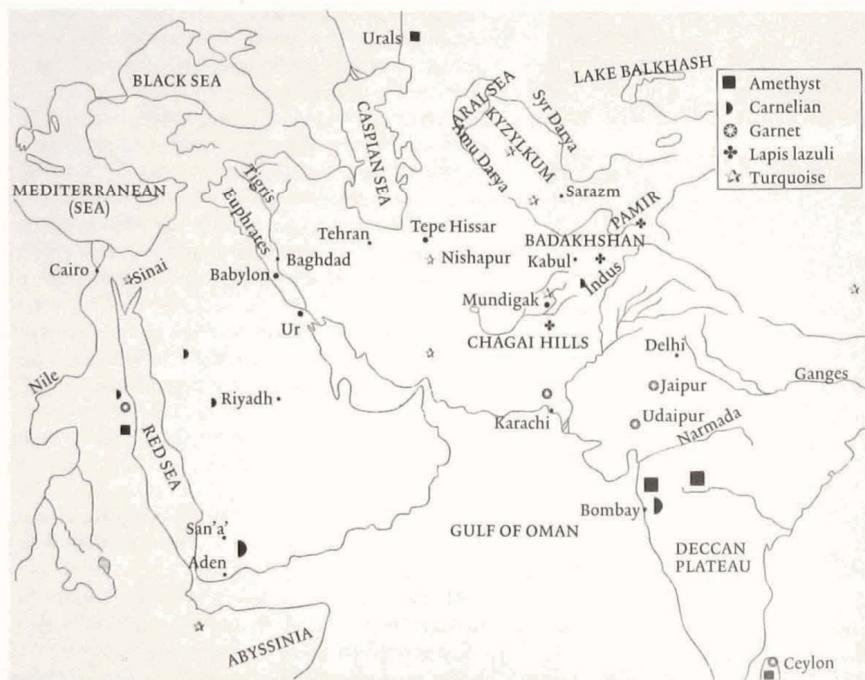
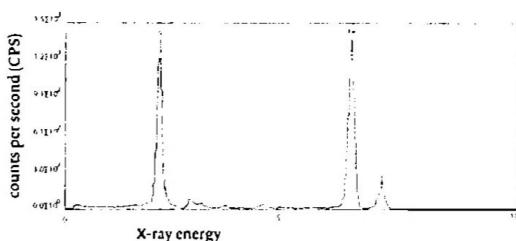


Fig. 3 Map of deposits of amethyst, carnelian, lapis lazuli and turquoise, according to A. Bouquillon and J.P. Poirot, F. Tallon, *Les pierres précieuses de l'Orient ancien. Des Sumériens aux Sassanides*, from the Musée du Louvre, Paris, Éditions de la Réunion des Musées Nationaux, 1995

Gold composition

	Gold %	Copper %	Silver %	
Gold ring with gem 04-40-116	1.9	5.3	92.8	
Gold ring with gem 04-40-116	19.9	33.3	46.8	
Gold figure	04-40-109	0.9	3.9	95.2
Gold pendant	04-40-109	1.0	2.3	96.7
Gold adornment	04-40-113	1.1	1.8	97.0
Gold ring	04-40-117	1.7	2.4	95.0
Gold ingot Ai Khanum	04-42-3	1.1	2.1	96.8

Fig. 4 Spectrum identifying pyrite through the presence of iron and sulphur



close to Kaliningrad (formerly Königsberg), but there are other deposits in the world. Some were found in Romania, in the Buzău valley in the Wallachia region, which were exploited by the Romans; also in Azerbaijan; in eastern Siberia, on the shores of the Yenisei River and on the Kamchatka peninsula; and in China, in the Fushun region in Manchuria. Chemical analysis with X-fluorescence established that the amber from Tillya-tepe contains sulphur and potassium in addition to several organic substances.

Garnet

Garnet (silicates of varying composition) is a transparent, purple-red stone that is very hard (7 on the Mohs scale). In Tillya-tepe it was found shaped as semicircular cabochons (necklaces, cat. nos. 129 and 81). The visual appearance of some inclusions (slivers of mica, ilmenite crystals and needle-shaped rutile quartz) and the absorption spectrum indicate that this is almandine garnet, rich in iron. Chemical analysis by X-fluorescence confirmed this diagnosis by indicating an iron oxide level of approximately 30%. From earlier research on the use of garnet in Merovingian cloisonné jewellery it appears that in some cases it is possible to establish the origin through the composition. Based on the composition and the inclusion types, the garnets from Tillya-tepe were classified according to the typology of this research as almandine type II. This means that this garnet originates in India, to be more precise in the large deposits close to Jaipur and Udaipur in Rajasthan.

Amethyst

The centre of one ring (cat. no. 57) consists of an oval amethyst (violet quartz) cabochon, surrounded by smaller semicircular cabochons of turquoise, amber and lapis lazuli. This large stone (~20 mm) has a dark purple stain in the middle and a distinct violet/pale blue dichroism (splitting light into two different colours). Amethyst is fairly widespread, but in view of the cabochon's features, this stone probably derives from the Deccan Plateau in India.

Nephrite jade

Cat. no. 102 is a gem with the depiction of a humpbacked ox, engraved with circular movements in a convex, lengthwise drilled bead of nephrite (a tremolite-actinolite amphibole mineral). The mineral's density of nearly 3 and its 1.6 refraction index confirm that this actually is nephrite jade. The main deposits are found in the Khotan area in southwest Xinjiang.

Pearls and mother-of-pearl

Drilled pearls, sometimes badly damaged, are found in several objects (pendants and inlaid work on brooches: cat. no. 80 and cat. no. 39). The X-fluorescence test confirmed that these are pearls, due to the presence of calcium. Some inlaid flat pieces of mother-of-pearl with geometrical shapes were also found (cylinder, cat. no. 54). The three main sources of sea pearls are the Gulf of Oman, the Red Sea and the Gulf of Mannar between Sri Lanka and India.

Other materials: hematite, bone, cinnabar and plaster
With the X-fluorescence chemical analyses, other minerals could also be identified. For instance cat. no. 100 is an amulet with a large cabochon of hematite, a dark brown, virtually black, iron oxide. The eyes on the mask-shaped bracteates 04-40-322 have been inlaid with minuscule pieces of bone (apatite, calcium phosphate). The flower-shaped bracteates (cat. no. 47) have been inlaid with bright red cinnabar (mercury sulphide). And to finish, plaster (gypsum, calcium sulphate) was used to fix the turquoise on the sandal clasps (cat. no. 106).

Glass

In several cases, the objects were inlaid with glass. This material often reveals a strongly damaged surface with numerous tiny round holes and an opaline lustre, for instance the gem on the stone with the Heraclids (cat. no. 120), the cabochon on the bracelet (cat. no. 127), or the swastika on the dagger scabbard (cat. no. 115), which has changed from a blue into a red-brown colour. X-fluorescence chemical analysis reveals that the first is a translucent potassium glass containing iron and manganese, the second is lead glass which has been coloured by the copper, and the last is soda-lime glass coloured by the microscopic parts of iron and copper it contains.

Gold

The composition of some of the gold found in the objects was ascertained through X-fluorescence. The concentrations of gold, copper and silver are listed above left. Except for one ring, cat. no. 55, the gold content is extremely high (95 to 97%). The low copper content (less than 2%) indicate that this probably is native gold, not smelted with any metal additions. Cat. no. 55 consists of two types of gold; the gold of the engraving is a little less yellow, corresponding to an alloy more rich in copper and silver. The similarity between the gold of the Tillya-tepe objects and the gold ingot found in Ai Khanum is remarkable.

Comments

This research demonstrates the exceptional diversity of minerals used to adorn the Tillya-tepe jewels, including turquoise, lapis lazuli, carnelian, amethyst, mother-of-pearl, amber and glass. This diversity corroborates the importance of the archaeological site, the fusion of diverging cultural influences and the central position of Tillya-tepe in the network of trade routes connecting distant countries. It is rather tempting to compare the Tillya-tepe jewels to some of the jewels examined for the *L'Or des amazones* exhibition (Gold of the Amazons), which took place in 2001-2002 in Paris and Toulouse. The jewels in that exhibition originated mostly from southern Russian cities such as Rostov and Azov, the main substances used for inlaid work were also turquoise, carnelian and garnet, and they are very similar to the Tillya-tepe jewels. For instance the above mentioned gem containing a nephrite inclusion (cat. no. 102) finds its counterpart in a baldric (carrying strap) clasp made of nephrite and originating in Rostov, or the amethyst cabochon on the ring (cat. no. 57) can be considered as the counterpart of the amethyst cabochon on the circlet found in the treasure from Novocherkassk. However, the Tillya-tepe jewels have been inlaid with lapis lazuli and pyrite, which is apparently not the case for the Rostov and Azov jewels. Conversely, some pieces from Rostov and Azov have been inlaid with coral, which cannot be found in the Tillya-tepe jewels. To conclude, the jewels from both Tillya-tepe and Rostov and Azov were made of pure gold, which means that it was smelted immediately after extraction.

Thomas F. Calligaro,
Centre de Recherche et de Restauration des Musées de France
(National Centre for Museum Research And Restoration),
Palais du Louvre, Paris, France

Tillya-tepe, the link with the east

'Scythia, which stretches towards the east', writes Pompeius Trogus in the *Historiae Philippicae*, as quoted by Junianus Justinus in his shortened version (Book II, Chapter II), 'is bounded on one side by the Pontus Euxinus [Black Sea]; on the other, by the Riphean Mountains [Altai]; at the back, by Asia [Minor] and the river Phasis [Rioni River in western Georgia]. It extends to a vast distance, both in length and width. The people have no landmarks, for they neither cultivate the soil, nor have they any house, dwelling, or settled place of abode, but are always engaged in feeding herds and flocks, and wandering through uncultivated deserts. They carry their wives and children with them in wagons, which, as they are covered with hides against the rain and cold, they use instead of houses. Justice is observed among them, more from the temper of the people, than from the influence of laws. No crime in their opinion is more heinous than theft; for, among people that keep their flocks and herds without fence or shelter in the woods, what would be safe, if stealing were permitted? Gold and silver they despise, as much as other men covet them. They live on milk and honey. The use of wool and clothes is unknown among them, although they are pinched by perpetual cold; they wear, however, the skins of wild animals, great and small. Such abstemiousness has caused justice to be observed among them, as they covet nothing belonging to their neighbours; for it is only where riches are of use, that the desire of them prevails. And would that other men had like temperance, and like freedom from desire for the goods of others! There would then assuredly be fewer wars in all ages and countries, and the sword would not destroy more than the natural course of destiny. And it appears extremely wonderful, that nature should grant that to them which the Greeks cannot attain by long instruction from their wise men and the precepts of their philosophers; and that cultivated morals should have the disadvantage in a comparison with those of unpolished barbarians. So much better effect has the ignorance of vice in the one people than the knowledge of virtue in the other.'

This idyllic portrait of a peaceful folk is echoed in the theme of space and freedom elaborated by the Scythian ambassador to Alexander the Great: 'I hear that for the Greeks the isolation of the Scythians is proverbial and that we are mocked for it. Yes, we love our deserts more than your big cities and fertile fields' (Quintus Curtius, Book VII, Chapter VIII). Then he continues in a slightly menacing tone: 'Consider that we hold the keys to Asia and Europe and that we are, as it were, the sentinels who guard both realms. We are only separated from Bactria by the width of the Tanais [probably the Orexartes or Jaxartes River, now the Syr Darya]. Beyond this river our area extends to Thrace, and it is said that Thrace borders on Macedonia. So we are your neighbours on both sides. Consider what you prefer, to have us as friends or enemies [...].'

In northern Afghanistan, not far from Sheberghan, in Tillya-tepe, the 'Hill of Gold', six graves were found during the excavation of a citadel from the Iron Age. In these graves of a 'barbarian' luxury, from the start of the Christian era, lay five women and a man. The bodies were dressed in clothing stitched with gold, decorated with turquoise, garnet and lapis lazuli. The jewels are reminiscent of Scythian gold from the northern banks of the Black Sea, whereas the Chinese mirrors dating from the



Crown, detail, Tillya-tepe, grave VI (cat. no. 134)
National Museum of Afghanistan
Photograph Thierry Ollivier

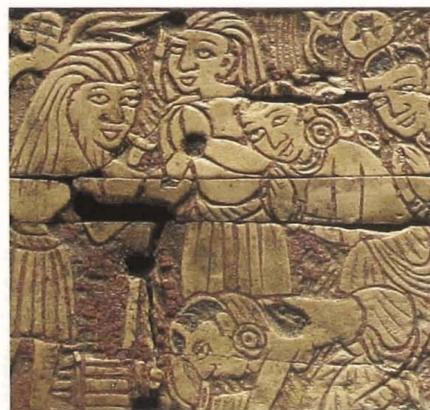
early Han Dynasty (first century BC) bear witness to a world open to the whole of Eurasia, as far as the Far East. As well as classical gems showing the profile of the goddess Athena, an ivory comb was also found with chased ornamentation (cat. no. 99), the style of which immediately evokes Begram, or Dalverzin-tepe in Uzbekistan. The crown with delicate and fragile vegetal forms (cat. no. 134) is a precursor of Korean art from the time of the Three Kingdoms (first to seventh century AD) and the 'Bactrian Aphrodite' (cat. no. 135) with its childlike appearance resembles the objects from the Scythian-Parthian period excavated at Sirkap near Taxila in Pakistan. These pieces are the reflection of a nomadic society, in which luxury and refinement go hand in hand with tolerance and curiosity about unknown worlds. They lay next to pendants on which the 'Master of the Animals' slays dragons (cat. no. 61), a belt showing horsemen riding panthers and holding a *kantharos* (drinking vessel) (cat. no. 107), and a ram (cat. no. 108), of particularly fine realism that derives directly from the Achaemenid art of Iran.

Who were these princesses and this prince found on the Afghan-Uzbek border? Were they the very first Yuezhi, a nomadic tribe who, according to the Chinese envoy to

Central Asia, Zhang Qian, made camp to the north of Bactria around 138 BC, as Viktor Sarianidi, the discoverer of Tillya-tepe, thought? Or were they just one of the Saka clans, related to the Scythians in the west, who lived as nomads between the Urals and the Altai Mountains? It remains a mystery, but it is clear that Buddhism made its appearance here at the edge of the steppes, with a gold coin showing a puzzling design known as 'the man on the wheel' (cat. no. 119), marked by the triratna, the three Buddhist jewels. In grave III a coin showing Tiberius (reigned 14-37 AD) was found (cat. no. 95).

This treasure indicates a nomadic world dominating the gold route from the Altai Mountains, that was the centre of a vast network of trade, where the jade came from China and the garnet from India, the turquoise perhaps from Iran, and the lapis lazuli from Afghanistan. In 1985 Viktor Sarianidi, in his book, divided this material into various categories, based on the influences that he believed he could see: Mediterranean influences from the Graeco-Roman era, the Bactrian background with (pre-)Hellenistic influences, the echo of the Far East and the Chinese connection, the eastern world and lands beyond the Altai Mountains and Siberia. According to Sarianidi, the treasure is linked to the very first princes of the Kushan Empire (first-third century AD); it seems that Afghan history can often be related to some symbolic figures, such as Alexander the Great, Kanishka and Kujula Kadphises, the founder of the Kushan Empire. Along with an ivory comb with strangely styled figures with a pointed nose and oval head (cat. no. 99), there were three Chinese mirrors which three of the women (graves II, III and IV) had on their breasts. All three are of the same type and their decoration suggests the firmament, a piece of cosmic symbolism. Although some pieces in the graves certainly have Chinese themes, the style remains astonishingly 'classical', with unmistakable Hellenistic influences, rather than Iranian. The synthesis that Tillya-tepe suggests actually links China to the Mediterranean via the steppes. An astounding iconographic fusion, with cupids perched on dolphins in the Oxus river (cat. nos. 50 and 80) or shoe buckles showing Chinese mandarins, proud under their baldachin or canopy, on a chariot drawn by mythical creatures (cat. no. 106).

Tillya-tepe is more than anything an interplay of echoes, an interaction of endless and far-off resonances that covers the whole of Eurasia. It displays an eclectic and open nomadic world that looks at other worlds curiously and cultivates beauty. A good example is the gold goblet with a Greek inscription supporting the cushion on which the warrior rests his head (grave IV, cat. no. 123). He is the



The hermit Ekasringa and princess Nalini, detail, Begram, chamber 13 (cat. no. 192)
National Museum of Afghanistan
Photograph Thierry Ollivier

Ivory comb, detail, Tillya-tepe, grave III (cat. no. 99)
National Museum of Afghanistan
Photograph Thierry Ollivier



Ornament from a golden circlet,
Silla Kingdom, 5th century
National Museum of Kyongju
Photograph Musée Guimet

Golden bracelet inlaid with jade,
Silla Kingdom, 5th century
Kyongju, Hwangnamdaechong,
National Museum of Korea
Photograph Musée Guimet

Eagle on golden crown with jade head,
3rd century BC
Ordos, Mongolia
Photograph Musée Guimet

Master of the Animals, presiding over dragons recalling those of Asia, represented in accordance with a traditional ancient oriental pattern; however, the Master of the Animals is dressed as a nomad. The goblet has the same shape as the ribbed *phiales* (bowls) depicted in the glass-ware found in Begram, and also in Cologne. Other examples are the daggers (cat. nos. 113-114). They display mythical beasts that are typical of steppe art (the same type of daggers have been found in southern Russia), but only here is the lapis lazuli combined with turquoise. Here the swastika evokes the Indian world, but the fighting monsters are naturalistic; their tangled bodies, in their realism, recall the Hellenistic world, the banks of the Black Sea or the splendid gold filigree belt buckle found in Pyongyang, capital of North Korea.

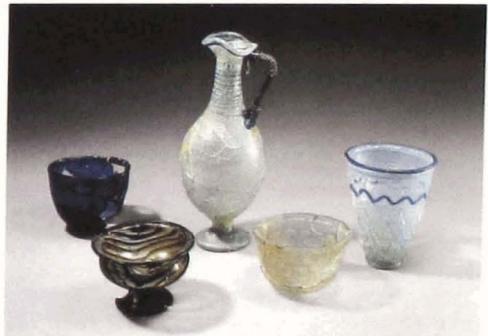


Pair of sandal soles in gilded bronze,
Silla Kingdom, 5th century
Sikrichong, National Museum of Korea
Photograph Musée Guimet

The gold came from the Altai Mountains¹ and the Scythians dominated the supply route. This simple fact is a logical explanation for the influence from far-off lands suggested by the Tillya-tepe gold. Because, although it recalls the *kurgans* or burial mounds of Ukraine and southern Russia, and the Indo-Parthian Sirkap, it also evokes the lands beyond the Altai Mountains, in the Far East, particularly Korea. The gold shoe soles from grave IV (cat. no. 89) recall the numerous examples of gilded bronze found in Kyongju; the crown from grave VI (cat. no. 134) shows links with the crowns and gold decorations found in the excavations of the period of the Three Kingdoms that shared power in the Korean peninsula from the first to the seventh century AD: Paekche in the southwest, Silla in the southeast and Koguryo in the north (the Koguryo or Goguryeo Kingdom also included a large part of the mainland, now Manchuria). Whereas a light and practically floral structure was found in Paekche (tomb of King Muryong, who ruled from 501 to 523 AD), evoking the graphic character of the decorations from the north, the decorations from ancient Silla look stranger with their stylised and abstract trees, enhanced by jade *magatamas* (beads in the form of droplets) with a beautiful green colour, a far eastern echo of the gold droplet-shaped bracteates from grave II of Tillya-tepe (cat. no. 74). The structure of the graves themselves is closely related to those of the Altai Mountains; and in the tumulus of another Korean excavation, Kumnyong, Roman glass was found, which suggests direct importation via the steppe route². A gold ring inlaid with agate and jade, found near the grave of King Mich'u (reigned 262-284 AD), finds a direct echo in rings excavated in Kazakhstan, and also in the cave paintings of Kizil in Xinjiang (cave 69)³.

Pierre Cambon

- 1 Lombard, M., *Monnaie et Histoire, d'Alexandre à Mahomet*, Paris 1971.
- 2 'Silla tombs', wrote Kim Won-yong, 'do not produce dated objects and the dating of them is also difficult like the dating of the two neighbouring states. For the dating of Silla tombs we must rely on typological analyses of burial goods and comparative studies with Chinese objects' (*Art and Archaeology of Ancient Korea*, Seoul 1986, p. 175). He also mentions the presence of Chinese pottery from the 5th century AD in grave 98, the largest at Kyongju (Hwangnam-dong), in which, according to him, rests the body of the consort of King Nulchi, who died in 458 (*op. cit.* p. 185).
- 3 Cf Kwon Young-pil, *Silk Road Art*, Seoul 1997.



Chest ornament, detail,
Kurgan of Tolstaya Mogila, 4th century BC
Kiev, Museum of Historical Treasures
of Ukraine

Golden appliqué for clothing adornment,
Kul-Oba, 4th century BC
St Petersburg, Hermitage Museum
Photograph Musée Guimet

Glassware, Silla Kingdom, 5th century
Kyongju, Hwangnamdaechong,
National Museum of Korea
Photograph Musée Guimet

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Authors

Paul Bernard
Pierre Cambon
Jean-François Jarrige
Véronique Schiltz

With the contribution of

Omar Khan Massoudi
Gonzague Quivron
Fabienne D'Allava
Thomas Calligaro

Text editor Dutch version

Arnoud Bijl

Editor English version

Fasttranslator: Robert Allwood

Translation French – Dutch

Renneke Hellermans
Monique Abelin
Eef Gratama
Michèle Schedler

Translation English – Dutch

Fasttranslator: Mieke Tulp

Translation Dutch – English

Fasttranslator:
Bernie Ranson
Ida Mahieu
Greta Holmer

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Hamid Simab

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